The Castle On The Hill

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The Castle On The Hill

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Summary

Will Graham is a paranormal investigator with a rare gift - he can empathize heavily with spirits of the dead, to the extent that he has become a living gate to the other side.

Simply put he is attractive, but not much by looks. He's a rather dirty fellow, after all. There are rumors he lives alone in the woods... No wonder he always has leaves in his hair.

(Normally Hannibal Lecter would be completely averse to such a character, but vampiric and romantic standards extend far more to the mind than to the body, and what a mind it is...)

Notes

If you're familiar with 5e DND rules you might get a chuckle out of this, but the knowledge isn't necessary! It was written in the style of an RP originally, Bo writing Hannibal and Matt writing Will, but it has been edited to create a flow so it can be read as a story. It is not segregated to points of view and so the character's thoughts will be observed as they experience them.

This is a story created by two best friends who very much like to write and we are very excited when it comes to feedback and love to hear what you think, even if it's just a lil kudos. Criticism is also welcome.

A warning for adult content throughout, especially in later chapters. Spicy!

On with the show!

In Which Will Graham Very Much Hates His Job

Chapter Summary

Will makes a trek. Hannibal fans the flames. A ghost urges a final farewell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"That's when I saw him!" Franklyn finished, nearly short of breath in his hysteria, hands gesticulating maniacally in the moth-eaten armchair across from Will Graham's loveseat.

"The Count?" Will asked, his leather bound notebook opened as he scribbled notes into it in charcoal, careful not to smudge each line.

"Yes, he was seven feet tall, white skin like a ghost, and had black eyes, and three arms, covered in blood head to toe, writhing like a snake over his latest victim." Franklyn continued, and Will resisted the urge to roll his eyes. These sightings had been dramatic enough without exaggerating, and this man was obviously decorating his realities with his fantasies. Beasts like this didn't require you to write poems about their glory, they needed to be discussed realistically lest one be drawn in by the romanticized allure of mysterious information.

"He *howled* at me and sprayed blood everywhere, onto the ceiling, and took his clothes off and then turned into a *bat*, and after that he flew into the castle on the hill…!" The man squealed. Will nodded, closed his notebook and struggled not to pull his legs up off the floor and under his body, exchanging comfort for the illusion of keeping himself professional.

"That's all I need. You can go."

Franklyn balked. "But I have more!" He protested, and the investigator nodded.

"I'm sure you do. Goodbye."

There was an awkward silence as the man toddled out, but Will didn't look after him as he went, instead picking at the charcoal he held and finally pulling his legs up under him. This was the last of what had been far too many interviews for the day. Three or four would have been fine, but that had been at least ten.

Eyewitness sightings were exhausting and one of the worst parts of his line of work. The least they could do was write him a description, perhaps sketch a picture, but the mayors of these various villages and towns always insisted their stories contained nothing ever

experienced or seen before, and thus had to be heard out and traveled far and wide to attend. This mayor had even loaned Will a special room to use in the Capitol building as an office, which wasn't as impressive as it sounded, as it was very dark and dusty. It wasn't the perfect room for home base, but it would have to do. Politicians loved to try and shock and scare Will, to ward him away, to spin horrible tales in hopes he'd spread their woes far and wide (thus creating very nice tourism and trade bonuses) but in reality these sightings were more often than not quite isignificant. The evil and malevolent monsters would be a single spirit or small, pesky demon rid of with a warning sigil and a prayer.

Will blew air over his forehead and stood after studying his notes, deciding not to waste time. No sense drawing it out - he would visit the castle on the hill.

On one side of the city he called home was well populated, but on the other side there were expansive forests. It was quite varied as far as landscapes went, but it was lived in enough to the level where it was not hard to find maladjusted spirits of the dead who had been trampled in the pursuit of progress. The castle had been there for as long as anyone in the area could remember but it was also long abandoned, and if anyone had approached it in the last hundred years the spirits would doubtlessly have notified each other of a disturbance. Anything terribly old should be left alone, Will always warned, especially if it had been left to its own devices for too long. Unfortunately no one paid attention to what he had to say about those types of things, not until they sensed a "legitimate" problem or until they had something to sell about it.

So up the hill went Will Graham, his satchel laden with the essentials. Book. Charcoal. Water. Knife.

The forests around this castle in particular were vast, dense pine and cedar leading through the sprawling property. It cut itself off with twenty foot high walls created of crumbling stone and connected by an iron grille gate, which was a sacrifice made to maintain aesthetics, no matter how much it happened to bother it's owner to take the rust off every now and again.

At the time one particular Will Graham was trudging up the hill, Count Hannibal Lecter was seated on a stool in the wine cellar, tending to his most recent acquisition. His victim, a young man, was busy staring at nothing, relaxed in a soft velvet chair, his right arm extended with the sleeve of his blouson rolled up over the elbow as delicate and practiced fingers slipped a hollow medical grade needle into a thin, purple vein.

Reaching over to his medical kit, Hannibal connected a glass tube that siphoned from the needle and fed down the tube into a large glass jug.

"You are being very kind Mr. Holcomb, as your life will be given to another so that they may survive in your place. You have my deepest thanks." He said.

Crimson eyes went to the young man's blank expression. He couldn't respond of course - Hannibal had mentally probed into dear Colin Holcomb's head and stirred it with the hot fork of his own will. He gradually heard his heart rate slow, and he closed his eyes to listen closely as the time between beats increased gradually like the end of a grand orchestral performance, before silencing entirely as the flow from needle to siphon halted, reducing itself to minute drips into the tube.

"Delightful." He said with a pleased expression as he stood from his stool, withdrawing the needle and dissembling the siphoning rig before sealing the large jug of blood with a cork into its thin neck. Mr. Colin Holcomb now had an appointment with his large furnace adjacent to the wine cellar. He lifted the body effortlessly over one shoulder, hardly wrinkling his clothes before stepping across the stone floor to open one of the largest furnaces, blazing hot and heavy as if he had casually opened the gates of hell. Unceremoniously, he tossed the body in and shut the squeaking iron door before securing it with a flip of the latch.

Turning from the cellar and reluctant to waste further time, Hannibal stepped once onto his left foot and quickly flashed through the abundant shadows of his beautiful castle into his comfortable study. It was huge, with walls of leather bound medical volumes and journals, most of which were old as the castle itself, but had not been moved from their shelves in centuries. He knew what they said.

Hannibal sank gently into the beautiful red velvet chair in front of his drawing desk, pulling a crystal bottle of blood from one drawer before pouring it into a pristinely cleaned wine glass. As he poured his mind's eye was disrupted by the sudden image of a young man's face, brown curls framing a soft but square and masculine jawline, brows knit together as he approached the Lecter property gates. Hannibal blinked and focused back on his glass, intrigued. It was a foreign feeling to consider a stranger was breaching his property of their own free will for the first time in-- why, it must have been a decade at least.

The duckweed grew higher than the grass in this area, winding around the iron gates like vines without leaves, coarse to the touch. Will wrote a note about them in his notebook with a few quick strokes of his charcoal before stomping his way through the weeds in order to survey the crumbling stone pillars that framed it. He took a deep breath, his eyes fluttering closed as he tried to connect to the spirits, attempting to communicate in any way that he meant no harm.

"I'm not here to hurt or... Poach anything." He mumbled, lips barely moving before he cleared his throat. "I'm gonna climb over the wall, but I don't intend on disrupting you, I just want to look." He said louder, nodding to himself.

It didn't take much of tromping through the weeds before he found an old piece of the wall that was half-destroyed by what had probably been lightning, and he took a vial of holy water and splashed it on his hands before scaling it. It wasn't an easy feat and he scraped a hole in his elbow trying to make it across, but he made it to the other side with great effort.

What he saw on the other side was vast, all encompassing and grand. An aged manor stood mighty in its infrastructure, and it seemed to Will as if it was still living and breathing, though it had tired itself from long life. He couldn't help himself as he stood for far too long to marvel at it, wishing he was any sort of competent artist so he could sketch it in his notes, but he instead memorized every part of it he could and etched it into his memory with his eyes. He moved again after a long moment, shaking his head.

"Wish I lived here." He groaned to himself. "Wish it was this hard to talk to me in person, that's for sure."

He found his way back to the gate and walked up the cobblestoned pathway, lined with cherry and crab apple trees that grew wild and large. He took one of the cherries from a low branch as he walked, enjoying the crisp sweetness of the fruit as he approached the front door of the manor, looming and great.

Tonguing the pit in his mouth through his anxiety, Will inhaled through his nose.

"Hi." He greeted bluntly, nodding his head at the door. "Sorry again, for... Not waiting for anyone at the gate. I'm just here to take a look around." He looked at the door, up at the roof, and down at the ground while saying this, covering his bases. If this was a magic mansion with a mind of its own, it deserved to be communicated with as clearly as possible.

Still at his drawing desk, Hannibal watched the young man through the eyes of his property, taken aback. Over the centuries many had trudged clumsily through the area, taking their hunting dogs through the woods while trying to seek out the monster they heard to be on the hill. Unfortunately for them, they were not as respectful of ancient things as the man he was looking at now. This stranger had manners, and Hannibal's lips twitched at the observation.

He thought fondly back upon the Norsemen who many centuries ago had been considerably fond of invasions. They were large and savage fighters, taking no time in breaking down the large gates that had always shielded his castle. Hannibal was young then and far less controlled, his reckless and untamed actions drawing to a finish only when gouts of black blood covered him, naked and feral in the moonlight.

When Will's gaze scanned the estate’s front they ran up briefly towards the roof, catching a movement in one of the high windows towards the east wing of the castle. It was a woman, long black hair framing a beautiful heart shaped face and dark almond eyes. She was dressed in a fine kimono that turned misty and black about half way down her shoulders. Just as the stranger saw her, his eyes were compelled to look away and observe something else.

Hannibal continued to watch peacefully, and when Will looked down and saw the door was gently ajar, as if it always had been, he could see the man's stomach drop.

"Okay." He said.

Alright, Will thought to himself. There were definitely spirits or... Something, around here.

"Uh..." He started to say, moving his hand up to perhaps touch the door, then thought better of it and brought it back down. "Does this mean - may I come in?"

There was no answer, but if the door had opened so cordially on its own, he could probably enter at least the foyer. Yes. That was fine, it was fine. He stepped into the warped wood, barely pushing it aside. It ground under his fingertips and took no effort to open all the way. The estate welcomed him with a warm creak.

The room inside was immaculate. A long staircase traveled on both sides of the walls leading to a separate floor, all cherrywood and velvet carpeting, red stained into every inch of the architecture as if it had been born into the textures. The walls breathed, sending a shiver down Will's spine, and he *immediately* turned to leave. There was someone here. There was

obviously powerful magic here and *no one* should fuck with it. He should go back to the town square and etch a warning into the center fountain that said DO NOT TOUCH the damn mansion. Leave it alone. It was fine! Nothing to worry about.

As he turned to leave he quickly realised the door was locked. Bugger all, he'd tried.

"No... No no no..." Will moaned into the hush of the room, chin twitching as his eyes darted from one area to the next. The interviewees had told him people had come in here and had turned around and come back, he thought. They said it was safe to look, they said whatever it was was dead, no one mentioned anything alive. They'd lied, hadn't they? They'd lied to him, no one had ever come back from this place. The mansion was alive and it was the thing taking people from the town. Mystery solved!

He grit his teeth, breathing through his nose. Fine. Fine, he'd be the first. He simply had to look the mayor in the face and announce his detective work had been a success.

Hannibal closed his eyes in his study and inhaled deeply through his nose, a soft grin tugging at the corner of his mouth. Since the young man seemed so curious, it would be a shame for him to waste such an opportunity to take a look around. He could smell electric anxiety in the air, feel the tingle of perspiration begin in the young man's palms... There was honeysuckle and spanish moss in his scent and a very distinct odor of mouthwatering *curiosity.*

Hannibal stood from his chair and took silent steps across his study before he sunk, dispersing like smoke into a shadow between his bookshelves. He moved invisibly through darkness to shadows in the foyer, watching the young man for himself now with his own eyes.

Long soft brown curls swept slightly off the stranger's forehead from anxious hands dragging through the strands, his pacing footsteps impatient. He was not old, butnot the youngest, he observed. A grey-brown stubble littered his jaw. The most average of heights and builds, agile as most men were too. He was a little plain, if one could be honest. The Count himself stared, unseen and unblinking, tilting his head curiously from within the shadow. He made an attempt to listen deeper and further in, probing unnoticed into what he presumed were vulnerable thoughts before hitting a fortified wall. He was using protection from mind-altering spells and tricks. Clever, but there were bound to be cracks in that fort, cracks that could grow into fissures if probed enough.

This was a human, but that word had many meanings. Did he have all the organs of a human? Yes. Did his mind work as a human's did? Well it certainly followed the parameters, but it absolutely didn't stop. There was no way to know if it stopped at human.

"No way, you're not reading me." Will told the house, far too loud, his voice echoing back to him off the staircases. "These thoughts are mine." One of the things he *knew* he could do was read people, so well that he could nearly open their minds like a book, but no one could read a house, so that option was off the table. In order to read a mind, you had to know how to get in. If you knew how to get in, you knew how to keep someone out.

Hannibal was disgruntled by this fact, and didn't try again immediately. He could wait.

Will took his first steps into the house, going to his immediate right. There was a long hallway here framed with windows on the left side, and shadows fell over his face as he travelled down the high-ceilinged room.

He frowned down at his hands, thinking about a cantrip that his family had taught him, incredibly simple. Prestidigitation. Light. He could do light if he focused, right?

His eyes focused and unfocused as he zeroed in on his hand - it was late evening outside, almost sunset, and if the house was to get dark he could find his way around if the spell were to work. He could tell something was happening as his fingertips flickered weakly. To light a torch in a living house would be madness, he thought. This was the only option.

He came upon another huge door, just barely ajar. Hopefully this one had a door *out*. Adjusting his palm to face forward, he asked "can I come in?".

There was a sigh from the house, a movement of air that gently caressed his back, coaxing him forward into the dim parlor room with a roaring fireplace in one wall. There was a chair in front of the fire and behind it sat a large oak drawing desk covered with scattered sketches in charcoal, the top one a perfect recreation of the pathway to the front doors, arching apple and cherry trees blossoming over it cheerfully. This drawing, unlike it was now, presented the castle as if it were immaculate on the outside, perfectly cut stones free of the creeping vines. Everything was still alive and breathing in this depiction. It was a memory.

Shadows crept slowly along the floor, shifting with the light from the fire place. A brick and marble mantle held a black cast iron stag in the center. Just above it was a gold framed painting that was as wide as the fireplace and at least a meter and a half high.

There were five people in the portrait. First was a tall and distinguished older man possibly standing next to the Lady that Will had seen in the window but barely managed to place, hazarding a guess. To the left of the woman were two small girls, one with a stern expression that matched the Lady's, round faced and pretty with slightly curly black hair that barely brushed the shoulders of the purple gown she wore. She was gently holding the hand of an even smaller, younger girl with a cherubic smile and a smattering of freckles, head full of wispy golden ringlets that framed her fair cheeks. She wore a dress that matched the other girl's and a broach with the letter "M" framed in gold and sapphires. Standing in front of the older man was a boy about twelve or thirteen with chestnut brown hair and eyes so stunning that the artist had paid particular attention to them. They were a very pretty shade of red-toned honey.

Cast in gold along the bottom of the frame was the family name "Murasaki-Lecter", gilded with gold stag antlers that wrapped around the letters, reaching up toward the family.

"Wow." Will managed after a moment too long of staring at the painting, realizing he hadn't blinked once since being brought into the room and rubbing at his dry eyes. "So it's gotta be one of your spirits here, huh? Maybe all of you are still here?" He walked over to the drawing of the grounds finding it gorgeously made and expertly constructed. "This must have been what the outside used to look like." He murmured before his skin flushed and rid itself of color simultaneously, stomach dropping into his feet.

The fire was lit.

(Dead spirits don't light fires.)

Will's eyes frantically darted from one corner of the room to the next over the arching and jumping shadows cast by the fire that was suddenly too hot on his skin. Sweat beaded in his palms and his hair stood on end - hands going into fists in his panic. He'd been so caught up in the novelty of the room that his mind had accepted the fire as something naturally occurring and not foreboding and impossible. There was also barely any dust. Some detective he was!

The door was closed, and as Will looked frantically every which way he saw nothing past the two huge windows and walls filled with various sculptures and books. He wished again that he had a better affinity for magic past making lights and other useless frivolities.

"I mean you no harm. I didn't come here to hurt anything." He reassured, and the fumes from the fire stung his nostrils. "I was under the impression I'd been invited?"

Emerging from the chair by the fire, dust and light began to gather together, forming a translucent silhouette that worked hard to manifest itself. After a moment it was clear - sitting in the chair, pale small hands folded in her lap sat the Lady of the House.

Black eyes from the portrait now gazed directly at Will, slightly illuminated but almost entirely expressionless. Her long straight hair was streaked with gray wisps, flowing gently as if her body were under water. Her voice was soft and echoed, separated into more than one tone. She spoke in careful English.

"You should not be here. It's dangerous."

Hannibal watched from a shadow, his eyes narrowing on the manifestation of Lady Murasaki, meddling as always with his affairs. He recalled harshly a memory of her scolding him, sharp words in Japanese putting an abrupt end to his experiments and games with swift smacks to his bottom.

The Lady sat unblinking, her expression giving away nothing. "You should go."

The house sighed once more, extinguishing the fire in the fire place as if it was never burning. The charcoal logs snuffed themselves out, not even glowing with a single lingering ember. The room is dark, now. The large windows showed the graying purple sky of late dusk.

The Lady's voice echoed to the young man as she began to disperse, her manifestation quickly fading, "You must go. Before he takes further interest in you."

Will swallowed hard, shaking his head before thinking better of it and nodding at the woman. She was an ethereal beauty, looking straight at him and yet through his body, and he felt the air grow heavy. He could sense more than one presence, but he could only physically see the woman of the house. "Yes, I should, I'm sorry for intruding." He apologized, stumbling his way over to the door urgently.

It still didn't open. *Someone* wanted him to stay and *someo*ne wanted him to go. He glanced back to the window with a fevered gaze, and then again at the woman, who was slowly dematerializing.

Shit. Shit. Now or never.

(He would look back on this decision as one of his worst)

His left foot went behind the right and he crouched slightly before breaking into a sprint, bracing for impact before he crashed through the window with a yelp of pain as the glass cut into his skin, and he landed on his side in the overgrown grass of the lawn, shards cutting into him as he whimpered. He wasted not a second to get up and begin running out, away, towards the wrought iron gate and away from the living house with the warring spirits. Blood dribbled from his cut cheek as he stumbled across the roots of the cherry trees and the rotten crabapples that littered the ground.

He was warned. He'd been good. He'd done everything right, he'd followed directions. He could see the gate. He was nearly free.

As if out of nowhere in his rush for the gate, a tall man stepped out from behind one of the cherry trees in front of Will, and before either could truly react, Will smacked full body into him. It felt like hitting a wall and he glanced off of it with a cough, head spinning for a moment as he was steadied with large, sure hands on his arms, and his own hands rose to grasp desperately at strong biceps. As he found his bearings he realised what he had done, creeping horror settling into his skin like an unwanted dip into a brisk ice bath.

He had run straight into the boy from the painting.

Chapter End Notes

This is still getting traction so we are still editing mistakes as of 12/2023! That means we're still looking at comments and replying to questions. Thank you very much for reading.

In Which Hannibal Lecter is Suddenly Very Hungry

Chapter Summary

> First meetings are always a little awkward, especially if only one of you knows how to make decent conversation. Also, let Will Graham say fuck.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are you quite alright?”

The figure was staring back at him, age settling into his features with grace, chestnut brown hair gathered low in a black velvet ribbon. He was incredibly handsome and Will wished to gaze at him like he did the painting, to study and indulge himself in such mysterious allure. Compared to the visage of the Lady of The House who warned Will to get away, this spirit… Rather this *human man* was entirely flesh and blood.

Hannibal looked down at the cut on Will's face and then back towards the broken window, his thin brows lifting slightly. A heady scent filled his nostrils, thirst and hunger burning anew in his throat and stomach. This was impossible - he had just fed the day before and finished draining someone for storage this afternoon. There was no need to be so desperately thirsty like this.

Will was smart, well read, and he knew that a human man couldn't carry such a magnetic aura about him without it being unnaturally manufactured. There had to be a spell at work, he deduced; some kind of enchantment at play. He quickly ducked his eyes and looked at the man's chest, letting go of his arms and trying to bow. Anything to be as respectful as he could, anything to preserve just one more second.

"You're the...." He tried and failed, starting again. "I am sorry for breaking your window. I'm leaving and I'll warn others away immediately if you let me go." Stinging nettles of glass bit into the arm he had fallen on top of and smarted as he tried to pull away.

Hannibal was unwavering. "You're badly cut. What may I ask were you doing on the other side of that window before you decided the door wouldn't be efficient enough of an exit?" He pulled a handkerchief from his trouser pocket, folding it and placing it to Will's bleeding cheek, the other wincing and pulling away before he could touch the head wound, obviously averse to touch in general. The little bit of blood soaked through to the other side of the soft fabric, staining and embedding itself into the threads there permanently. Saliva pooled behind his teeth and over his tongue.

Will noticed that the man’s fingers were soft and incredibly delicate, treating his face like spun sugar. He was handled very kindly but still not openly allowed to leave, so the

investigator kept his eyes trained on the ground.

Was this who had tried to read his mind? He was decidedly all firm muscle and bone, nowhere near the wisp of the woman he had seen in the armchair in front of the fire. His voice was like the sound of running your fingers through fine sand, smoother than gravel and as mesmerizing as an hourglass.

"I tried the door I came in. Door didn't work." He said shortly. "Lady in there told me to leave. Your Mom or something, I'm not sure."

He tried to remember his manners, but frustration eked it's way under his words. "Anyway, I'm trying to leave, sir. I didn't have any other options. I am assuming," he scowled at the ground, not one to have total control over his expressions, "That you locked it behind me, since *she* certainly couldn't have."

Was it a poltergeist? Sometimes those could embody flesh, but it had aged from the picture if that was the case. There was also the possibility of it being a mimic, and that was a very intimidating thought.

Hannibal simply looked at him. This young man was incredibly bright and undoubtedly paranoid from his experience as a human in the darkest and possibly the most horrifying parts of this world. Honesty radiated from his every pores, making him bluntly forward. He was polite for the ancient grounds and for the spirits, but when faced with flesh it seemed that the standards were significantly lower.

"The Lady? My... My mother?"

He smiled fully now and chuckled, "No, heavens, no. She would be my great-great-*great*-aunt. There are many spirits that roam these grounds and I'm afraid some are prone to cruelty against trespassers. I apologize on their behalf, however you may consider resisting the urge to make entrances into more homes without a proper invitation in the future." His tone was pointed, but teasing.

"Right." Will's tongue felt thick. There was no way he'd been wrong. He hadn't sensed anything living here from the valley but he could usually feel someone's aura from a mile away, that was his job. But sure as hell, this living man had stepped into his path, probably having been out there tending the dismal gardens of the older, spiritually infested estate, and Will had been too busy talking to everything else to notice.

As he let his mind wander over the one in front of him all he could sense was warmth, slight frustration and concern. He'd broken his window, of course he was *concerned*. He'd broken into this man's house and then fucking *decimated his window*.

He glanced from the ground to the trees to try his best and meet the man's gaze, but at this point it was so difficult he didn't try for more than a few seconds. Shame filled his stomach like cornstarch and water, weighing him down into the cobblestones under his feet. Guilt sat heavy on his head.

"Of course they're cruel to trespassers, and I was definitely trespassing." He said offhandedly, licking his lips. "I thought they'd... Invited me in, but I see now that wasn't the case, I... Do you... Live here?"

Of course he lives here Graham, what are you thinking? What are you on about, he admonished himself, and his teeth grit tersely, jaw clicking.

"Yes, I do." There was a warmth in Hannibal's voice that was almost fond, seeing shame and embarrassment clearly on Will's face and wondering why he had even attempted a peek into his mind at all when he could easily just read his expressions. It was delightfully refreshing, compared to most people.

"I do live here, and while I do want to forgive the damage to the window and your trespassing," he tried to gently catch Will's eyes with his own again, but didn't insist upon it, "I would feel much better doing so if you came inside and allowed me to treat your wounds. Afterwards I can escort you off the grounds to the road and then you may return home. Does that sound appropriate?"

He gently gestured back towards the front entrance of the castle, now sealed shut, the redwood shining softly in the approaching sunset.

"I hope you won't mind using the door this time." He teased. The fresh, shy embarrassment was delicious, it filled smooth cheeks with the most decadent flush like a carnation in bloom - Dash it all, Hannibal couldn't help but reprimand Will a little bit just to smell the blood pool.

"Please."

Will ached to go back to his family, to walk in, tail between his legs, ready to tell the tale of his grand failure, but the man was insistent, his voice still washing over the grounds like the smooth pour of the tide. Why the hell would he want to treat his wounds? Was it some sort of habit? Or maybe he intended to trap Will in there? What if he really was a poltergeist?

The investigator took one step away from the man before it stuck him that he must be terribly lonely. Peoples enjoyed *c/em>company when they were lonely, when they spent all their time in a dead garden, tending a spirit-filled castle in the middle of nowhere.*

The realization made his lips quirk up clumsily in a sort of combination grimace and grin. He had never really been good at smiling, as jittery as he was, but one could tell when he was genuine about it because it reached his eyes and it didn't stay in one place. His mouth was lopsided, teeth a little underbitten and he didn't like to look at it in the mirror - but smile he did, at this strange man.

"I regret to inform you that I'm not very good company." He said mildly, stuffing his hands in his back pockets.

"Neither am I. Even the spirits try to avoid me at times.” Hannibal replied.

"I wish they'd avoid me more often." Will said before sighing. "If it smooths things over, I guess I can't say I know how to handle injuries. Are you a doctor or something?"

He made a move to begin his walk back up to the house, warning bells echoing in his mind. Don't stay, the woman had said, although he didn't remember the exact words. Maybe she was what kept the man so alone, he imagined that he said back to her sourly. This was good, he was doing something good. He was apologising for the window. It wouldn't take long.

"I have studied and practiced medicine for some time, since I was a boy. I had a rather extensive education." Hannibal answered as he stepped slightly ahead of Will, leading him down the pathway under the cherry trees.

"I felt as though my entire existence was built upon other people's work until I found freedom in my various degrees."

"You know, that doesn't surprise me."

"Oh?"

"I guess you strike me as the... Academic type."

"I do hope you mean my cadence. I work so hard to appear well-read, after all."

"You're well-something, alright."

They reached the large door and Hannibal unlatched and pushed it swiftly and effortlessly, showing him the foyer that glowed warmly the moment it opened.

He stepped out of the way and invited Will in with a soft gesture of his left hand, "Please, come in." He then paused a moment to turn back.

"Forgive my rudeness, I have invited you fully into my home but have not introduced myself. I am Doctor Hannibal Lecter." In the light of the hall Hannibal was striking, toned skin drawn over sharp masculine features.

"Um, I'm William. Graham. You can call me just Will if you want, everyone else calls me... Just Will." Will said, reminding himself why he didn't like talking to people, especially not people who spoke as if they were reading straight from the pages of an etiquette textbook.

“Nice to meet you, Will.” Hannibal said with a slight inclination of his head.

“Do you talk to the spirits often, to communicate with them?” Will continued disdainfully, immediately trying to move past the tragedy of his introduction as he stepped into the great house, suddenly feeling underdressed to even stand next to the man. He was as put together as a finished puzzle, all regal finesse, not a hair out of place. Compared to Will, who’s curly brown strands were tangled around his sweaty face, fallen long ago from it's green ribbon that was lost to the woods, this man may as well still be in the oil painting along with his great-great-grandnephew. Will's clothes had fit him fine for years, almost a decade, but the man's outfit probably hadn't been worn in a good few weeks. It looked pressed with an iron, coiffed with all manner of starch and sweet perfumes.

As far as people went, to Will he seemed quite charismatic, warm, and friendly, but the investigator was still too nervous to look him fully in the eye. Something lingering about him seemed dangerous. He was all perfect and all elegance and all grace and all suspicious as hell.

"I don't speak to the spirits often, no. In the dull darkness of eternity, spirits move through the void slightly detached from us who walk on the material plain. However some," Hannibal led Will up the left staircase, deeper into the house and down the first west corridor, "are beacons of light in the darkness for them. They are drawn in like moths to a flame to someone who may be able to see and hear what they have to say."

Hannibal could see it, the bright blue light that radiated off of Will and created a polarising magnetism that drew in the dead. A flame in the darkness of eternity, he had seen and felt the second the man had breached his property line. It was pure power that roiled unruly beneath the warmth of mortality.

"I have a lot of spirits living around my home, but most of them followed me there." Will admitted sheepishly. It was odd being recognized immediately as someone who attracted spirits. Most people didn't know until they were told that he was in tune with the spirit world, and even then they didn't realise the extent of it. Will found the dead to be absolutely unavoidable, and to avoid them he tried and failed.

Hannibal nodded, finding the statement familiar enough. "The spirits and I tend to respect a degree of privacy and boundary with each other here, though I am considerate of those boundaries more often than they are. Some of them even have spaces in this Castle that I do not go out of respect." Hannibal breathed a soft chuckle through his nose as he opened the large door at the end of the corridor into his library.

It was a massive space, the ceiling high and decorated with beautiful paintings. Every wall here arched high with thousands of volumes, practically pulsing with knowledge. Will’s mouth hung open as he drank in the space.

"Holy..." He said quietly in awe, "Your ancestors really put their hearts and souls into this place, didn't they?" He looked back at Hannibal, icy blue eyes wide with wonder and excitement. There was so much to explore here, given the chance. The library itself could sustain someone for years, and he wished he didn't need to eat or sleep to run through every tome unhindered. Hannibal wasn't only cultured... He was bred from culture, it seemed.

"They most certainly did. Centuries and generations of Murasaki-Lecters poured all of themselves into the very foundations."

Will once again felt inadequate as a visitor. He was much better suited as a *servant* than a tourist in this house. His own home, a simple clearing in the woods, collapsed with even a thought of something as grand as this. Just terrific, truly awesome.

The house breathed and light bloomed through the whole library slowly as if the room was awakened by Hannibal's very presence. Marble and stone met hand carved moldings and glass display cases of different antiques, heirlooms, and pieces of art that radiated arcane energy peppered the floor level of the library.

There was a wall to the left of the French doors that was just below arching stained glass windows that depicted the fall of Lucifer. The wall displayed hundreds of weapons collected over the centuries, vicious instruments of death from different countries of origin as well as snapshots in time. Samurai armour was displayed prominently in the center of the case, all of the bladed weapons with points facing inward, arching around the painting like rays of a violent iron sun.

Hannibal moved to a nearby wardrobe with glass paneled doors and opened it with a key he withdrew from his pocket. From the case he took a black leather medical bag and brought it over to a soft cream colored sofa, paisley of a slight sheen embroidered into the upholstery, and he patted the spot next to him gently indicating for Will to sit with him.

"I can feel the walls breathing." Will murmured and walked his way over to sit while trying to brush his hair out of his face and dragging his fingers through blood, scowling when they came across a sensitive area of his skin and ducking them across his tongue to clean them absentmindedly. His shirt stretched uncomfortably over his arm as he reached to push his hair back into a ribbon that was no longer present, and he faltered before putting both his hands down at his lap.

"Not everyone notices the heart within the home, or the soft creak of life in the floorboards. I knew you attracted spirits when you stated that the house seemed to invite you in. It must have taken a liking to your light. It certainly has been sometime since another human came walking upon the grounds, so it’s eager for an audience, no doubt."

"What's your favorite part of the house's collection?" Will asked, trying to seem like he had everything sorted in his whirlwind of a state.

With clinical hands, Hannibal opened his medical bag and withdrew a few corked jars and bottles. The contents varied in consistencies and color, only some of them easily identifiable. Hannibal pulled some fine trauma scissors from the medical bag and snipped small squares from a length of gauze.

"I am quite fond of my collection of cookery books, and the garden is something I am *really* proud of." It was a simple but intimate admission. He felt it quite effortless to share more of himself with this stranger. It was odd - he interacted so rarely with humans outside of meals, let alone holding such extended conversations with them about himself that it was a bit of an eye opener how long it had been since he'd held a longform conversation.

He then drew a corked bottle of something clear, dabbing some on to a clean cloth from the bag and gently cleaning Will's cheek free of blood, his face close as he did so. The liquid that Hannibal used made the wound tingle a bit, tickling like eyelashes brushing closely on Will's skin. With his face scrunched a bit under the close eye of a very meticulous attendant, Will found himself smiling the same wavering grin from before, humored.

"Your garden, is *that* what you're so proud of? I'm terribly sorry to admit that I must not have seen the impressive part." He said coyly, thinking of the weeds infesting the premises and the grey, spindly and overgrown trees lining the great pathways. "Unless you're proud of the route nature seems to have taken without your influence."

He finally dragged his eyes up to see Hannibal's expression as he smiled, and found himself wondering how such a well-rounded and charismatic man stayed up by himself in an ancient castle rather than using his time out and about. Then again, he was walking ankle deep with his open assumptions of the man.

"Often nature's own aesthetic choices are what man find most beautiful." Hannibal said. "A gothic and phantasmagorical appeal lies within mother nature, taking back what is rightfully hers with no regard to how men may feel about it."

The Doctor’s careful hands continued their delicate work, brushing Will's hair off of his forehead smoothly and gently to clean the wound in his hairline where he had struck his head, above the injury on his cheek. The scalp was quite tender and throbbed slightly with a trauma headache, radiating dully into the base of his neck. Hannibal could see it, heat pooling at the open wound and throbbing through the nerves into Will's skull. He was possibly concussed.

Long precise fingers grasped a shallow jar around it's brass lid, showing the man across from it the semi transparent greenish paste inside.

"This is an ointment of my own creation. It will promote rapid healing as well as soothe pain. It may feel a bit cold to the point of a mild sting, but that is quite common."

Hannibal gathered a small amount of the paste on his thumb and gently applied it over the cut on Will's cheek and the wound in his hairline. His fingertips brushed his cheek and ear as he worked, his own skin soft and caring.

Everything around Will seemed to freeze, whether it was by the doctor's cool breath or brisk touch, the dry breeze or the crispness of the air around them. He held his body back from shaking at it, licking his lips as the pain from the cuts miraculously dulled, his headache reaching a more manageable level immediately. It even made his vision clear a bit and he blinked owlishly in bewilderment, moving his head from side to side as he experimented.

"How did you make this?" He said, reaching to touch his head and finding it come back bloodless. The man must be positively brimming with magic, spilling like an overfilled mug!

"From my unimpressive garden." Hannibal replied simply, nothing coarse in his friendly flippancy. Will nodded, clearing his throat. There were way too many pleasant things happening here that he didn't deserve to be a part of. Soft touches, warm words, healing oils and sweet refreshments... It slowly began to bring suspicion back into his head. Nothing went this well for Will Graham, not unless he forced it to happen himself.

This was all the man said he wanted, to patch him up and then let him go, but Will had temporarily lost himself in being completely spoiled in what the manor had to offer alongside the kind, handsome man within it.

"I'm still in a bit of a hurry to get off the grounds, I must add." He added, sniffing and standing up, the cool gel on his face tingling pleasantly. "There are dead things in your house and dead things in the garden. I'm afraid that I have… Much to do with the rest of my day, and if you'll excuse me, I'll be on my way."

He made to bow (a little awkwardly) and started to take his steps away from the man, satisfied with himself. He hadn't been necessarily rude, but he'd been dismissive. Something was still OFF, and he couldn't lose himself to the temptation spread before him. He couldn't manage OFF, and he didn't have to, so out he went.

Hannibal stood and moved in step with Will back out of the library, down the same long corridor to the staircase leading down the the main hall. He seemed complacent and accepting, not putting up a fight in the slightest and seemingly unaffected by such an announcement.

"If you wish to go alone, I can make a path for you along the quickest and safest route off the property." Hannibal's tone was mild, his eyes flicking towards Will every other step. "It would be unfortunate if you were to tumble the wrong way over the stone wall after all of this fuss."

"Yeah, yeah..." Will responded helpfully.

Hannibal opened the front door once they reached the foyer, wide and friendly. "Which would you prefer, Will?"

"I think I can walk out. On my own. Thank you very much for your kindness, I'll make sure to let people uh-- know," he pulled out his notebook sloppily "--That this place is very much inhabited, well taken care of, and um, to be cared for in return. Nothing about you, Doctor Lecter, I assure you. I'll strike your name from it so they don't ask questions." It was an assumption, but he couldn't see how he could be wrong.

He looked out the door, back at the doctor, and out the door again.

"Right. Goodbye." He said, stepping out the door and tromping away at a reasonable pace.

"Thank you very much, dear Will," Hannibal's brown eyes twinkled with a fond warmth, calling after him.

"By the way you weren't completely truthful with me earlier, as I found you to be rather pleasant company. If you ever feel so inclined, you are welcome to come again. Perhaps you'd like to see the greenhouse next time."

"Maybe. I mean… Thank you, uh huh."

Hannibal stood in the doorway with his hands gently clasped together behind his back as he watched the man begin down the path, taking a deep inhale through his nose as the soft summer breeze blew Will's scent back towards him. Yes, this man definitely built forts around his psyche… But forts could easily be captured with the correct strategy.

His breathing synced with the swaying of the fruit trees now cast in the bright light of the rising moon. Before Will was beyond the stone wall, Hannibal held out both hands in front of himself and an arcane tome appeared, black ink smoke blooming from his palms, the pages flipping rapidly to the page he needed.

Twitching two fingers forward, he cast a dark sigil into the air before flattening his palms, and the sigil moved swiftly alongside Will, the stirring pitch black mixing into itself to form a small spectral stag that hovered just slightly over the terrain. It paused and looked back at Will before gently turning, leading the man far down the property along a different way than he had trampled his way in. It was an overgrown path off to the east of the property that cut down the gradual descent of the hill by passing a large field, and lead calmly to a part of the road where if one squinted they could see the lights of the city down below.

The little stag lead Will right to the property line safely before turning to look at him once more, and then back towards the city.

Will waved at it helpfully before feeling quite silly and putting his hand down with a sigh.

When he initially reached home, it was to a cacophony of noise. Barking, yelling and whining came from inside the forest even as he was half a mile away, and it made him roll his eyes. Everyone was so dramatic when one of the family left for more than a few hours, not that anyone but Will had much business outside. They all kept to themselves as a group and mostly followed Will, as he had the most activity outside their circle and incidentally was a terrific provider, especially when it came to spoiling the little ones. He could never stop himself from spoiling the little ones.

Upon entering past just the first tree, his little brother tackled him by the waist with a sharp noise, tugging at his clothes and nearly knocking him over.

"You're home! You're back, you're home! Oh Will! Oh big brother, big brother I missed you." He cried, his soft hair falling over his eyes before he pushed it away and dropped off of Will, breathing heavily in his excitement.

"I had a long day. I gave like... Fifteen interviews." Will explained, ruffling the boy's hair before being tackled again by someone nearly between the globes of his ass. "Holy-" he barely managed before face-planting into the ground, his little sister whining behind him sadly.

"Oh! I'm sorry! I'm sorry I'm sorry!" She said in a very high pitched voice, coming around to trample on his hair and try to lick and snuffle at his face.

"Winston, can you-"

"Yeah, I got her." Winston said, his tail coming to stand up straight as he picked the pup up between his teeth by the scruff of her neck. Her own tail went between her furry little legs and her mouth fell open as she panted guiltily, showing the whites of her eyes.

"We've talked about no jumping, Harley. I'm farther away from the ground, on two legs right now. If I fall I'll get hurt." Will explained gently, motioning to Winston to put her down.

Harley just whined and rolled over to show Will her stomach, so he picked her up and travelled deeper into the forest. Winston stuck his wet nose into Will's back as they walked, snuffling suspiciously. "You smell like spirits and holy water." He yipped, sneezing and then looking up at him with warm, wondering brown eyes.

"I was just in a haunted mansion, actually." Will explained before coming into their clearing. He was greeted by all sorts of noises from several different dogs and two wolves, but all of them older, so no one came running but Buster who trotted up to him with a of water in his jaws, which Will accepted graciously, sipping at it.

"A haunted mansion, eh?" The old feller said with a huff. "That's what you get for gettin' in a house and closing yourself off from nature. Humans are idiots, they think that creating a box is a good plan when spirits actively seek out the dark? Ain't nothin you can do if you can't see by the light of the moon, that's all I'm sayin'!"

"Well, not everyone gets adopted by a family of forest druids who teach them how *not* to live in a box." Will said good-naturedly, putting Harley gently on the ground and accepting another pup to hold as Winston crawled into his arms instead, hugging the boy and scratching him behind the ears. "I know way more about navigating by the light of the moon than that Hannibal Lecter, I'm sure. Plus, I still have to sleep in a tent."

"What'd he look like? Huh? Huh?" Harley asked excitedly, tripping over her front paw and smushing her nose into the ground. Winston looked at him as well as Buster, and Will rolled his tattered sleeves up before his features began to shift, warping around and moving fluidly across every bit of his body. They liked to ask him who he talked to, liked the smells more than anything. It was a fun variety show for their day, and he hadn't used much magical energy yet either, just physical.

The one and only thing the druids had successfully taught him to do with no effort wasn't out of any specific spell handbook. He had tried spells time and time again, most teachings only proving to be good for teaching him a lesson in accepting failure. He could probe minds, but only to an extent, and he was quite good at keeping his own mind guarded. But what druids could do besides that, better than spells or magics, was transform their bodies into anything they wanted from very early on in their teachings, and that is what Will had managed to grasp - and grasp it he did, better than any other magical concept he had attempted. The path of the moon was straight and narrow, and he could toe it just as well as the rest of his pack when he used The Wild Shape.

Only limited by beings he had shared eye contact with, Will could transform into any animal form he chose, essentially becoming them inside and out. Any physician would find their brain, eyes, nose, mouth, and innards completely intact and how they were in the originals. He created a perfect copy, down to the paw prints and oftentimes their thought patterns and the way they processed problems and puzzles. He didn't try with too many humans because they were far more complex, but now and then a human shift didn't harm him. As he shifted into Hannibal Lecter however, the good-natured Physician, the mid-level sorcerer and friendly hermit, something went horribly, horribly wrong.

"Nn… Bhgh, ff-" Will began spitting as his face warped into the one he had seen earlier, high cheekbones and a strong jaw, tall and broad and well built. Something had immediately began to go south - His body was suddenly in massive amounts of pain, every inch of his skin boiling and rolling, his sight faded in and out, everything too bright, it smelled horrible like decay and wet earth and old mold. He could hear the birds from a mile away, he could feel every molecule of hair on his fingertips from Winston's fur, the inside of his mouth tasted

foul and horrible and he was screaming in someone else's voice and his insides were coming out of him and everything

was

going

dark

Chapter End Notes

A druid in this universe, of not make completely clear, is not a direct copy paste from 5e. It simply takes the building blocks and constricts a different type of power set! If you have questions that you really don't get in this chapter feel free to let us know, we check our emails very often.

In Which We Witness The First Of Many Nightmares

Chapter Summary

Will goes back to the manor, for some reason. Hannibal has no complaints. The pups get a treat.

Chapter Notes

If you have any confusion over points of view, let us know and we'll fix them right away. There are two authors, so it can be confusing at times who's thinking about what, given the nature of these varied perspectives. Thanks for reading. If you'd like to see art for the fic, we'll be posting it on our twitters, Princewellmatt and kinghimbojones.

A stranger was crying in Will's dreams, echoing soft twinkling hiccups and long extended wails of loss and hopelessness - a young girl crying out and weeping unseen in an endless night of a vast birch forest. The trees were identical, standing in shadowed gray silhouettes against the light of the full moon. He stood in the middle of them like he'd been frozen there, a sculpture left to gaze upon the living for an unmeasured lifetime.

After mere seconds, the landscape of the forest violently flashed and shattered in fragments, the moon turning red in the sky as unnatural crimson and black flames engulfed the trees. The smoke was thick, engulfing Will and forcing its way into his nose and mouth, choking him, filling him with it's suffocatingly dry and burning heat. It burrowed deep into Will's organs, into his very bones, pushing invasively into his every blood cell, nerve, and muscle.

The crying was replaced with a young boy's screams and the violent roar of destruction from the cruel and unnatural flames. Crackling and cracking through the birches, burning limbs and branches fell, fire raining down from above just as the Lord had sent down upon Egypt within the trials off the Pharoh.

The image twisted in Will's vision, the flames whirling up high into a vast swirling column of destruction churning in and in on itself. Spanning miles, the column of flame whirled and narrowed over the land before being sucked up into a blood red sky and disappearing entirely.

The land left was desolated, black and gray and red with the smoking embers, and the screaming had stopped. Collapsed in the center of the torn land that spanned acres around him was a panting boy, tears streaking through ash and dirt that caked his young face, intense

and fierce eyes illuminated bright red and glowing under the darkness of a furrowed brow focused straight ahead.

The image shattered again as if another mirror was struck by someone who did not like what they saw. The boy was replaced by flashes of the glowing eyes watching from darkness, staring unblinkingly before Will awoke surrounded by his family and feeling the mud caked into his toes and fingernails, miraculously free of the blood he expected to smell.

Hannibal had quickly stepped away from the foyer as soon as Will Graham had made his exit. The black tome in his hand was snapped shut and dematerialized into thick wispy smoke as soon as the halves met.

He glanced up to see Chiyoh standing with her arms crossed over her chest, leaning against the oak frame of the North corridor that ran under the twin staircases. Violet eyes focused harshly on his face and he ignored them, his hands clasping gently behind his back as he moved past her.

"You let him go." It was a simple statement, her face blank besides the unnatural intensity of her eyes.

"And what would you have me do, Chiyoh? Flay, behead, and place him upon a pike in the lawn?" He remarked in her direction, not paying her enough mind to spare her a glance as his thoughts filled with crackling blue power and soft curls and dark lashes.

She followed behind him in measured steps, moving through the familiar corridor that lead down to the dining rooms, music hall, kitchens, and finally out back to the gardens. The heels of her boots clicked lightly on the ornate and polished marble and granite floor.

"What are you planning, Hannibal?"

"I am simply making friends." He answered with an edge of sharp impatience, one that didn't phase her even slightly.

"Friends are not possessions. You wish to possess him, own him and lock him in with you and the rest of your collection." She followed him across the unseen threshold into the bright, crisp humidity of the greenhouse.

Hannibal approached a long wooden counter and moved behind it, unbuttoning his jacket and leaving it to hang on the wall.

"Why ask if you already chose your own answer?"

"People are not pets, Hannibal."

"I assure you Chiyoh, my interest is just as harmless as yours is with who you choose to connect with." She wouldn't believe him, but she didn't need to. There was no use in a lecture, and she knew that.

She left him to his gardening without a word, at the end of her rope of a losing battle, and he was happy to watch her go.

Will wasn't sure when he'd gone back to sleep, but the aftershocks from his horrifying, possession-like experience were overpoweringly uncomfortable. Every part of him screamed angrily at him for allowing himself to be put in such a vulnerable position, and he shivered and shook all night even as one of the wolves laid by his feet, her fur thick and insulating, a Saint Bernard under his head.

It was late morning when he finally rose, peeling himself from the ground and running to the trees immediately to throw up water and half-digested venison. The bile felt like it infiltrated his pores and his ears stung like he held acid in them, and he whimpered into the grass among the edge of the clearing before being joined again by Winston, the pup pushing into him in order to put his head on his chest, licking his neck sadly.

"I'm okay, I'm... Fine." Will reassured him, running his fingers through thick fur amongst short, hurried whimpers. "I'm good."

"No you're not!" Winston protested, and it made Will chuckle. The boy was young, but he was incredibly motionally observant for a puppy.

"No, I'm not. Hell, I don't know how to get back to being okay." He said anxiously. "There's something seriously wrong with the man on the hill."

"You smelled like you were burning when you tried to shift." Winston said.

"I felt like it, and I dreamed of it." Will nodded, adding "He's cursed, I'm sure of it." In a whispered undertone.

"Cursed?"

"All of his senses are all over the place. He's overly sensitive to everything, even taste. I felt the molecules in the air, could see more stars above us than I even thought existed." He leaned over to take his notebook from his bag, searching the contents.

"The townspeople told me so many varying things about the castle that I assumed all of it was because of the spirits, but I didn't consider that the spirits somehow got him too. What are they doing to him?"

"Is he sad?" Winston asked, his ears drooping unhappily. Harley came over to snuffle at the both of them, half paying attention and wanting attention in return.

"I think so. I felt overwhelming unhappiness last night, like everything was falling apart, including myself. Maybe I should..." Will took his lip between his teeth, worrying it for a moment and petting Harley distractedly.

"Maybe I should go back... Try to clear some of the spirits away, figure out what his curse is to help him manage it. He used healing magic on me and then let me go, but I knew how

disappointed he was to be left alone again. Some spirits on the other hand prefer to be left alone, which must be why the woman warned me away. She wants to keep her routine."

He was just thinking out loud now, and Winston (massively without context to the ramblings) had lost interest and was trying to eat a bug that had landed on Harley's head, still pressed into Will's side.

"I gotta go back." Will whispered. "I can still protect the townspeople from those spirits, and maybe now I can protect him."

He stood to pluck two peaches down from the tree next to him, handing them to the now satisfied little hunters next to him, who were thrilled with a new something to accompany the bug.

"Don't go too long this time?" Harley requested with a hopeful lilt to her young voice.

"No promises." Will replied kindly, rubbing their ears and taking his leave after a pickup for certain tools and supplies as well as short goodbye to the others.

He had a duty he'd sworn to keep.

Sat in his library amongst his tomes and studies, Hannibal poured over his sketches, gentle and delicate details shaded in charcoal and grey and white pastels. Half lidded eyes raised, glancing up at the high arched stained glass windows that surrounded the dome. One particular window he was studying closely, recreating the image of Lucifer being cast out of heaven.

The naked and falling angel reached his hand high above himself, pointed fingertips attempting to claw back up the beam of light that engulfed a black wing. Tearing it away in fragments of scattered ebony feathers and splashes of blood as dark curls flew wild around the edges of his beautiful pained face, tears had begin to pour down his cheeks with the ache of betrayal from his Father. In the place of Lucifer's face was Will's, with a meticulously sketched soft jaw and short stubble.

The angel reached hopelessly upward for his father to catch and pull him back up to Grace. He didn't, for He knew no Mercy - not even for His own creation.

Hannibal looked up at the pane of stained glass, sun rays beaming through the translucent blood droplets as Lucifer's wings were torn from his body. The crimson light danced across Hannibal's face and he smiled a little, placing a charcoal pencil gently next to the sketch as he looked over it with a critical eye.

Suddenly there was a movement on the edge of his property and his eyebrows flew upwards in surprise. Will Graham had once again stepped foot past the gate not 10 hours after leaving it. A deep hot warmth lit in Hannibal's gut and his mouth began to water, feeling the ache of his fangs descending behind his lips as he sucked in a breath despite still lungs.

The first thing Will did as he approached the property was to look for the stag. There was something in him that felt pulled to the wispy and magical animal like a magnet, irresistibly

alluring. Alas, there was no animal to be found. Instead of finding his usual cobblestoned and crumbling fence, he instead went towards the gate, finding it unlatched just as he had left it the day before, so he slipped through easily.

immediately he felt the air pressing into him, just like he remembered. He didn't notice any sort of difference because from what he recalled, the place had a haunting aura to it that lingered and settled into your bones, everything creeping upon Will's psyche as it normally did to the over-attractive aura that he carried. He was a beacon for the wandering and the forgotten, and they ached to have him listen as only he could.

Walking up the path and swiping at the delectable cherries once more, he thought about coming up with some sort of plan, but found very little to make a blueprint. He had a few goals in no particular order, but that was all.

Ask Doctor Lecter if he wanted to help him rid the spirits from the place.

Figure out what curse had befallen him.

Ask him if he wanted it removed.

Easy enough, and spirit gathering was something he knew well. This wouldn't be too difficult... But the first thing he had to do was get back on Hannibal's good graces. After all, he'd been a little rude.

He stopped short as suddenly there was a soft high pitched wailing, deep in the forest. It was coming from the woods far to the east of the estate, oddly familiar, haunting tones. It continued for a few seconds and then suddenly halted, leaving Will reeling before he took his next few steps.

Hannibal's eyes stayed focused on his sketch. His ears blocked out the sound of the forest, choosing instead to focus every sense upon Will's presence. He felt a strange tugging deep in his gut that felt adjacent to hunger but simply *ached* . It pulled sharply at the hollow pit that filled his chest cavity.

Longing. A deep and aching longing that plucked at the heart he had after some time forgotten laid within his chest.

He heard the knocker, the heavy bang of iron against thick redwood. He didn't even get up from his chair, he just sunk into the shadows below it and emerged on the other side of the door that separated Will from himself.

He came back so soon after being in such a hurry to get away. Hannibal took in a breath, and the house did with him. He opened the heavy door easily.

Hannibal's kind eyes met Will's and he couldn't contain a rather amused smile. "Well hello again, Will. Good morning. Would you like to come in?" He stepped gently to the side, giving Will room to re-enter the castle he had so desperately tried to escape.

"Thank you." The man said as he stepped in through the door, once again barely containing a shiver as the house weighed heavy on his shoulders, making a grunt of effort to hold it all from crushing him slightly before it eased off, as if it were sensing his discomfort.

He stared at Hannibal's shoulders for a minute, thinking of a way to possibly beat around the bush before deciding he'd go for it, his dream rushing into the forefront of his mind.

"I wanted to apologise... For yesterday. Not for the window as I know I've apologised enough for that, but because I left so suddenly. I may be a private investigator but my paranoia took over, warned me away from the wrong thing." He said.

"In your line of work, the instinct for fight or flight has probably saved your life numerous times. You simply did then what felt most necessary to keep yourself safe." Hannibal replied warmly.

He lead Will down the North corridor, the same one he had travelled with Chiyoh the night before. The walls were decorated with art from various eras and styles, figures in the paintings seeming to move in the shadows of the space before Hannibal turned to a gilded and golden door that opened into a lovely music room. There was a small table set for tea between two arm chairs, a poured cup presently steaming as if this is where Hannibal had been before Will arrived.

"You look a bit pale, Will. Are you feeling quite alright? Would you like tea and something to eat?" He tilted his head curiously at the shorter man, soft concern dancing over sculpted features.

"I think I'm alright, but I can't say some tea wouldn't be quite welcome." Will said mildly, watching his own feet as they stepped into the room.

"...Well-" He said after a moment, the both of them sitting across from each other in one mirrored motion, Hannibal already pouring him tea like a gracious host. "There was *something* on my mind. I assume you've felt the spirits here, felt their all-consuming presence? I was simply wondering if you'd ever considered containing them, or contacting someone who could send them to the afterlife in peace. I ask because I am very experienced in all sorts of methods against otherworldly creatures, so I sense the disparity more than most."

He took the teacup carefully, studying the intricate design of the cup. "I say this against my better judgement and knowing they're your relatives... I find it a bit harder to breathe on the premises and I think you might feel a bit of the same." He looked up at Hannibal with worry between his brows, hoping that hadn't been offensive, lest Hannibal be sensitive to family matters.

As they made eye contact he suddenly lost his sight for half a second, a single blink, surrounded by black and red flames projected on the back of his eyelids before they vanished entirely. He took a long drink of tea that scalded his mouth, trying to ground himself again and blinking rapidly.

Hannibal took his seat across from Will and blew gently on his tea before setting it down on the table between them. "Their presence is quite undeniable." He nodded once curtly in agreement, "I had once considered their presence comforting, in a way." His face softened slightly as he continued matter-of-factly. "But... It is more important to consider *their* comfort."

There was strain in his voice and it was obvious he was trying to be as polite as possible right back. Of course Will felt presences all over the property. Not only did many spirits mourn the bodies that they lost to Hannibal and his cellar, he also extended his own presence into the stone walls of the place. The manor breathed as he did and happy as he was with the current arrangement truthfully he hadn't sat down to consider allowing himself to relinquish his grasp on each spirit of this land to cross over.

"I think you're right. It would be for the best. It would be refreshing to enter some parts of my castle that even I dare not breach for fear of trespassing on them."

Hannibal's head cocked slowly to the side, his eyes meeting Will's in the same movement, the motion almost drilling contact into deep blue. The day before he did not insist on it, but his patience could only take him so far. It was predatory, while still remaining neutral and amused. A chained beast. Feline eyes scanned over Will's frame slowly before returning to the contact. His voice was rougher now.

"Will you help me, Will?" Heat licked at Will's temples, a flash of the feeling of Hannibal's hands on his face the night before, their faces but inches apart.

The sensation was like a fist to the face, and Will cleared his throat as he was forced to adjust himself in his chair, hand coming up to rub his nose as blood flooded into the apples of his cheeks. That had been quite the glance, he supposed. Come to think of it there had been quite a few glances, but they had been so... Intimate. Every inch that Hannibal had run his gaze over felt electric, incredibly vulnerable although fully clothed and at rest. Will wasn't anything special, a bit plain, but here Hannibal was like a slinking sphinx, tail curling around his feet.

"It'd be my privilege, Doctor Lecter. I imagine only having a few rooms in such a sprawling mansion would be bizzare. I felt each presence as soon as I stepped through that gate. In fact, as you opened the door, I felt something enter my mind. Is something, or someone, possibly... Protecting you?" He asked, gently making leeway towards his suggestion of a curse, knowing it didn't go over well if you introduced the topic bluntly. He usually wasn't one for tact, as it wasted time, but… Hannibal's friendship held value to him, unlike most other relationships. He wasn't sure if it was because of the looks, the magic or simply his presence, but he didn't linger on the thought.

Will could see a realization dawn on Hannibal's face as if what Will prompted rang with familiarity. The count thought about finally being rid of the woman who he had been trying to be rid of in the first place before Chiyoh interfered and brought her back to torment him. Yes. Will could assure she was gone for good. Bound back in the pit where she belongs.

"Why... Yes actually. The Lady Murasaki... The very spirit you had mentioned spoke to you last evening." His face softened sadly, as if the thought of separating his great-aunt from the

grounds hurt him.

In truth Hannibal knew for a fact that the Lady of The House had grown quite fond of tormenting him in her little ways. She would move about the castle just after him like a trail, never interacting with him but disrupting his things. Hannibal would leave a room for a blink of an eye and return to find it in ruin with furniture knocked over, feather pillows turned out and their contents spilled, covering the carnage in a snow like fluff. She was especially fond of throwing his books across the room and knocking and smashing his paintings onto the floor.

Hannibal pinpointed her energy near the kitchens and he shifted in his seat slightly. Satan knows what of his china she will destroy if she stayed there too long. That damned woman.

"Tell me, Will... What exactly does it feel like to have someone enter your mind? I am not familiar with the sensation. But, perhaps I am just... Used to the invasive nature of the energies here. I admit that I am versed in the arcane but I am curious what your particular expertise is like. Do you often perform exorcism?"

"I suppose it's a bit like..." Will studied the question before him, taking a breath. "When you're alone, your mind is an empty room. Your space is familiar. You never think of it as being roomy necessarily, but everything is compact. When someone else is present, it's disruptive. You can feel it, like someone stepped into a closet with you among the coats and boots... But a person can be many things, they can be gentle, they can be chaotic, they can be too big to fit through the door, or so small you can't see them. When I work I prefer to open the door of the room and look inside, but I don't step in. I don't like reading thoughts word by word, I like... Taking concepts and freeing them. A gentle approach with spirits works much better than a violent one, but if I must... I will step into the room and pull them out on a hanger."

Doing this was akin to setting he and the spirit on fire. It was dreadful and horrific, and Will hated doing it, but it too often needed to be done. For this though, he was doubtful. She was family, and ideally didn't want to see Hannibal suffer.

The Doctor nodded slowly. "Too much clutter in the enclosed space, especially when another attempts to force their way in. I can understand that feeling. Quite well, actually." The way Will described the breach of his "space" in his head. The feeling of knowing another presence is there the second they probed.

At this moment he can see deer moving through the woods. He feels Chiyoh hunting them, her rapid movements approaching it before she pounces and drains the doe. He hears bees bumbling into daisies in the fields. Everything. When he reaches out, he can sense *everything* .

Hannibal's lips twitched slightly. "Do you wish to begin today or is there time in which you need to prepare?" His expression was eager and interested, curious and slightly detached to the idea of exorcising the Lady from the house, as if he had just accepted that this is what must be done because it was the right thing to do.

Will motioned to his satchel at his side, which held all of the things one needed for exorcisms. There was mostly knowledge needed to perform one, and the materials came second, usually simple and easy to gather.

He had noted as Hannibal spoke that he seemed considerably upset. It was odd, seeing the man so wrapped up in his own mind for a split second instead of so intensely focused on Will. It was the first time the druid considered him outside of being something mysterious and dangerous - he was just barely vulnerable here, and it was... Nice. It was nice to see him genuinely concerned about something instead of being what anyone would consider a perfect host in a perfect house. A perfect doctor.

Will put his teacup down and stood up. "Do you have a lower floor? I need somewhere with a clear space to draw sigils. And I wouldn't.... Mind if you uh, were also there or anything." It seemed intimate to invite someone to watch him work. Usually residents were so terrified they left the house in a hurry.

"Excellent." Hannibal placed his teacup in it's saucer and pat his thighs with both hands before standing. "Yes, I'll show you to the kitchen and the pantries, they are on the lowest floor and are quite spacious." And what luck that auntie was currently wisping about his kitchen, knocking cookbooks off of shelves. Such petty little disturbances that probed needles into his nerves. Rude for the sake of being rude.

Hannibal held out a hand to Will and gently pulled him up from his chair with a strong hand around Will's forearm, the clasp of which was fond but held something rugged behind long pale and graceful fingers. He kept Will pressed close to his side, not quite touching the length of their torsos but close enough that Will could feel the strong presence just adjacent to his body.

Every time Will was touched by Hannibal he felt it like it was the first time. Something about him was electric, and though Will didn't like being touched at all, there was something in him every time this happened that made him think that it wasn't quite as awful when Hannibal did it.

They moved swiftly down the corridor that opened up to a grand dining room. The room was bright with sunshine that gleamed off the polished dark oak floor, and Hannibal pushed open another set of doors that swung inwards, leading to a spiraling slope downward. The corridor was wide and entirely stone, sloped so serving trays and carts could be rolled upwards to the dining room.

"Oh. She's active." Will murmured as they entered the corridor, hearing little thumps and bumps as he reached into his bag to rustle through his belongings, taking his journal out as well as a charcoal. "Can you tell me how she died here? Was it illness?" As they walked he was also taking off his shoes. He liked to be as connected to the ground as he possibly could, even over a paneled, protected floor that wasn't even close to the earth.

"Yes. Active is absolutely a word for it. The Lady Murasaki was murdered while she slept." Hannibal answered.

It was warm with the heat of the boilers and ovens in the adjacent room they walked into now. On the open stone floor there are scattered recipe cards and books.

Hannibal stopped walking into the room just as one of the leathers holding his knives dropped off the wall and onto the floor with a clatter. Quite irritating, he thought. Those weren't easy to attach, and worse still to *reattach.* Violet orbs danced in the air and stop, gathering into one source of energy.

"Are you quite finished?" He asked her irritatedly, knowing that usually, as soon as he was in sight, she would fade away into nothing, content in her chaos. This time however the guess was devastatingly incorrect, and as he was considering the thought of her surrender, a flash of silver on the floor picked itself up and launched towards Hannibal as fast as a bullet fired from a pistol.

In Which Lady Murasaki Has A Terrible Day

Chapter Summary

Hannibal finally gets rid of his least favorite aunt. Will needs a nap and probably some therapy, but that's not really a thing in this universe. That's rough buddy. Getting therapy won't help you in the end though, so you're screwed!

Chapter Notes

I made a meme for this chapter.

You can see it here
https://twitter.com/PrinceWellMatt/status/1312142308297510913?s=19

Is funny. :3

Anyway enjoy the chapter. Comments make sure Will gets a hug as a treat

Unmoving from the doorway, his face unamused, Hannibal caught the blade between his index finger and middle finger. Suddenly coming to a stop, the knife gave a puff of air from it's ceased momentum as it whipped against Hannibal's cheek, his expression dark with annoyance.

"Holy shit." Will barely managed to say in an exhale before suddenly the woman was on top of him, her corporeal body flickering angrily as she stared into his eyes. Though not physically present he felt the phantom weight on his chest so completely that he fell back, stumbling and sliding across the wood flooring on his ass and elbows, his feet pushing him away from her.

"GET OUT!" she hissed, and it sounded like the loudest shout at the quietest volume, full of hatred with such a strong undercurrent of a bizarre anxiety that it made Will's skin begin to tingle with panic. He could shift right here and now into something stronger, he thought. A bear, a tiger, a wolf - but what would it do? He couldn't *wrestle a spirit.*

After a second he was following his instincts by tearing his shirt open to reveal the four sigils he had written earlier in a charcoal paste, warding him from possession and keeping her from getting too close again, lest she touch him with the sigils exposed.

"I'm sorry you were hurt, but there's no danger here anymore. The people who wanted you destroyed are long dead." He tried to placate, and her face angled itself down as she kept the bare minimum distance from his sigils, watching him barely under her brow bone. Her distance gave him the opportunity to reach into his satchel, the bottom of which was filled with powdered Sage and ground salt, allowing Will to take handfuls of the substance and put them on both sides of himself and to his front.

She lost all anger in her face as she realised she couldn't leave with his sigil blocking her slowly shrinking exit, and he quickly closed the warding circle with two more handfuls of sagesalt, panting heavily as he did so. His features grew wild with the animals rippling under his skin.

Hannibal melted into and along the wall, watching Will with his head tilted slightly from curiosity, his eyes predatory behind them both.

The Lady withdrew further back from the man in front of her before she lost her corporal form suddenly, very much still in the room. Her energy, all pinks and reds and purples, bounced and echoed in the circle of sagesalt, shivering and vibrating.

"No! This is my house!! He took it from me!" Her voice was a fierce whisper, echoing through the kitchen, the energy thick and freezing cold.

Hannibal's face didn't change from his focused coolness.

"Lady Murasaki, we only wish to help you move on from this place." He told her calmly.

The woman looked at him and trembled a few seconds before she began to cry. She recalled a dark shadow creeping slowly over her pale frame, nearly asleep in the midday for a relaxing nap. She remembered vividly the shadow lengthening suddenly, slashing across her throat with a clawed hand right before she tried to scream, an impossible amount of blood pouring from her wound. She was drowning and red was pouring and pooling across the floor, furniture and walls, her body seizing - something had begun to cling to her and was sucking her very soul out of her esophagus. Now it was the reverse of drowning, it was losing every drop of moisture, more than she even realised lay within her veins and skin as she withered and dried like a mummified corpse as all of the blood was robbed from her. It's a second death taken in moments, much worse than the first. She didn't know this was what he wanted. She'd entertained the thought… But evidently not for long enough.

She now watched as those same eyes flared, trained on Will and absolutely brimming with interest and amusement… As well as a familiar, creeping hunger.

"Run…. Get out…" she tried again weakly.

Will held his right hand out, knowing that though she was barely visible here that her spirit would remain inside his circle. She was obviously violent, disruptive and dangerous - something he was glad to have contained.

"I know this is your house, but you can't tie yourself to it forever, the world has moved on. You need to do that as well, to advance to your next life, your new place in the universe."

Will said carefully.

She had argued her points with Hannibal again and again, screamed in his face of his betrayal, bemoaned her wasted potential for years, and yet here was a new man, a new face, and he too was *completely convinced she was in the wrong* . No one was on her side.

Tracks of blood started trickling down her cheeks as she started towards Will again, more gentle. Kindness was a mask she put on with ease, though she was never a kind woman. Hannibal would never describe her as such.

"This is my house."

"This *was* your house. It *was* yours far longer than intended," Will said, and their eye contact became strengthened, his own eyelids fluttering. He felt pain and betrayal, and sudden echoes of his dream as well, stifling his breathing as his ears suddenly rang, and his throat was on fire, slit with a thousand knives. Someone she knew had killed her, someone she didn't like, someone she had been wary of, but not wary enough. She had trusted for too long and it came at a cost. She just wanted to be able to trust again in her empty house, all her own. No betrayal. She needed peace. She begged him for peace.

The Murasaki-Lecters were a physically affectionate family, he supposed, as she rested her forehead against his, and his own tears started to pour from his cheeks, both of them mourning her death. One sigil in particular in the middle of his ribcage began to sting, as if it were a week old wound, raw and tender.

"It's not fair." She said simply, as though she was a little girl. Will nodded. "I know." He said, sagesalt covering his hands as he pulled her in to his embrace, feeling the sigil burn them both as she wept.

"Death never is."

Soon she was curling around and into him, putting her head on top of his and nestling him into her chest, knowing she could do nothing but move on. There was nothing left for her here. Will shook with effort as he held her, engulfed in the feeling of hopeless defeat. There were no other options, whispered and dancing lights spelled in their eyes. There was no way this would end in her favor. She simply had to hope for good things in the next life, as she had failed in this one.

Will knelt slowly as her remains burned into his sigil, the barrier between this life and the next broken just barely, allowing her to more easily slip through. A cut, small and thin, cut into his forehead where she had pressed her throat, an echo of her wound the only thing she could leave behind as Will's eyes continued to brim with tears spilling over the coldness of his cheeks and mixing with the blood coming down from his forehead

Hannibal did not take his eyes off of Will and he felt his chest rattle as something else unlocked and poured open. He watched as the man took the Lady Murasaki, weeping blood into his cheeks flushed on grief. Will used himself as a gate, taking her pain and very soul into himself as she slowly burned away.

Hannibal's eyebrows were raised, his surprise and awe cracking through his usually serene demeanor. He had never seen something so beautiful. It was raw, and tender, and it filled his chest with warmth as the smell of Will's blood rushed to his nostrils.

Once the Lady is gone, the room is still. The overwhelming brightness immediately subsided into calm light, and both of them could feel the warmth of the ovens once more.

Hannibal approached Will, his footsteps soft on the stone but audible as he gently pulled the shaking man into a living embrace. He was strong and steady, grounding the man back into his own body - his own reality, void of the spirit he had allowed pardon.

"Stay with me, now. Don't cross the veil with her, Will." He gently held Will's face between strong and grounding hands. "Your moment is here, in it's finality." The doctor smiled, his eyes soft and flicking between both of Will's.

Will had never liked being touched. Touches were always half-hearted, impersonal things, including rough and clumsy hugs, usually stifling and uncomfortable. There was always someone ready with an unnecessary slap on the wrist, a touch on the cheek or shoulder or thigh. Touches never held real significance and were often texturally overstimulating, so he didn't indulge in such things. It was different with his family, he reasoned, because they were never humans. They said it themselves - they were a pack first, druids later. All of them preferred the canine shape and only took a human form when absolutely necessary, unless they were Winston or Harley, who liked to echo his lifestyle decisions often, as children often did.

He hadn't really connected until now that no human who really, genuinely cared about him had ever touched him. His aversion to touch wasn't solely based on how it felt to his body, touch was just incredibly intimate for him. Forbidden, like a virgin afraid of indulging with a lover before marriage. Sacred. And Hannibal's touches, his embrace and his breath and his hands on his face, felt sacred. Every move the Doctor made was deliberate, every choice pre-planned, nothing done with a single ounce of frivolity.

No client had ever treated him like this. Like an anomaly or a pet, sure. They praised him nervously and paid him quickly, but none had watched with wide, fascinated eyes as he worked. None were truly privy to the fact that every time a spirit crossed over that he was the gate.

That was what made him stay, his ears still ringing and his pulse still pounding, vision clouded. It was the energy rolling off of Hannibal in great, towering waves, wrapping around him like his own arms did to grasp great handfuls of the man's shirt, a whispering, childish chuckle bubbling over his lips as the man gently chastised him.

"You must be cursed, just as I thought." He said without thinking.

Hannibal much to his surprise chuckled, eyes smiling. The sound was rich, hanging in the air and about Will's ears like a tantalizing echo.

"Your instincts have served you quite well." Without looking away from Will's eyes, he reached a hand into the inner breast pocket of his velvet jacket. He wore a deep green today,

accented with neutral browns and greys throughout the fabric. The handkerchief was a cream color, and he flicked it out of his pocket and folded it. His eyes flicked to the wound with an implacable emotion as he pressed the soft silk against the wound and held it there firmly with one hand, the other on the back of Will's neck.

Once, he *would* have thought himself cursed. There were times when eternity was a concept he grew weary of. But now in this moment in time, Hannibal was blessed - what a beautiful cord of fate had it woven through centuries of time that he would have been able to live a life long enough to meet the man in front of him.

Here in this place Hannibal was gifted with a perfect being of incredible depth, experiencing emotions at such an empathetic level that he could absorb drifting souls and find the dead, leading them to their own paradise while holding onto much of their agony for them. With such a beautiful and celestial creature he held within his grasp now he knew he had never been more grateful for what he was, for how he lived.

"Come. Let's get you cleaned up. You must be quite tired."

As he said it, Will felt it, a complete exhaustion from the effort he'd just put forth. Hannibal's firm frame was still grounding him even as he felt Will's shaking begin to subside.

"I.... Mm..." Will mumbled, trying to come to his senses before Hannibal's strong, capable body lifted him up and carried him easily back to where they had been, the two of them gliding across the floor as one. Will wasn't able to shake anymore, as he was so completely weak in his joints that it made him feel like jelly. This was the only reason he let himself be picked up - there didnt seem to be a lot of alternative choices.

At this point after his job was done he usually bid farewell to anyone who had requested his services. By now he'd be tucking the reward into his satchel and running off to find the nearest little dip in the brush in order to crawl into it and use his wild shape to take on a small, four-legged form. For a man to lie at the edge of a rocky road and sleep was to be a dead man, mugged and murdered as weak as he was after working - but for a fox or a wolf it was an excellent choice, to sleep peacefully and disguised, the humanlike eyes it held undercover of the black-lined eyelids.

To do that here would be... Too far, Will thought in his haze. Too much for a fledgling friendship. He already had so much damn baggage, he already was needing to be lugged around like this - to suddenly have a dog running around would be a line he'd never even considered crossing before in front of a client.

It wasn't long before Hannibal was letting him down gently into a plush chair, comfier than the tea chair had been, and holding the bandage to his head carefully, allowing Will to take over handling of the cloth.

Soft, warm and lulling words purred into Will's ear before Hannibal left his side, making him feel incredibly warm and deliriously comfortable.

"Rest now... I'll be but a moment."

The words tickled across the lobe of Will's ear, across his cheek and down his eyelids, making them fall softly closed into the sleep he ached for, and he didn't have time to consider his preferences or possible repercussions.

Hannibal observed dark lashes upon Will's cheeks. He was pale, drained of his energy and stained with trails of blood, now smudged slightly from the silk cloth with "H. L." Embroidered on the corner. He stepped from the room out of Will's reach and got his medical bag swiftly.

He hummed softly to himself as, notes of a melody that had suddenly come to mind. A melody he absolutely must transfer from his thoughts to ink and sheet music, he decided. A melody for Will.

Upon returning Hannibal snapped his fingers twice next to Will's ear, satisfied when he didn't so much as twitch. He moved swiftly forward to place his face over Will's, inhaling the scent of him deeply, nearly pressing his face against the wound on his forehead. His teeth elongated slightly, saliva pooling over his tongue as he parted his lips to taste the scent as close as he could.

He smelled dogs and wolves. The forest. Fresh water and green plants. A stream. He saw flashes of the pack, Will alongside them on their land. Each inhale brought him closer into the man's mind, pressing into him slowly and comfortably, making his way in like a smile relaxes into one's disposition, comfortable and confident.

Will begins to dream immediately, so relaxed is he. His body falls slack as his mind runs wild, a familiar nightmare beginning to rear it's ugly head.

Will often dreamt of a period when he was much younger, ten or eleven years old. Times were simple when he had barely passed a decade in age, simple enough to where grief was not a concept he could completely and wholly understand. He had an average childhood with no major bumps in the road, and because of that he felt secure. He had faith in his future and care in his past, and a life in front of him filled with promises of love and passion.

A loving family being ripped away is never something a child considers preparing for until it suddenly happens.

But Will had been faced with it as he ran in from the day's adventures, looking forward to chicken pot pie and lemonade but instead seeing his mother and little sister staring down the barrel of a gun held by his father, the man who taught him to fish, to hook a line properly, to carve the bones out of a salmon so well you could see the indents of the missing skeleton after you cooked it so you could use the bones for sewing. It was wasteful not to use every bit of the fish, he'd said.

"You LIED to me!" The man was shouting, stringy hair framing his red face. "THEY'RE NOT MINE, THEY NEVER WERE!"

"Daddy..." The little girl wailed, and Will stood immobile by the doorframe, his blue eyes wide and lower lip trembling just as his father's hand was. She looked at the gun that he had been teaching her to shoot with, even though she was too little to understand the mortality of

the deer they killed together. Will would fish, and she would hunt. They had enjoyed the individuality that brought.

"No, no, you're wrong!" Whispered Will's mother, the bandana on her head holding her hair back from slipping into her tears. "I..."

"GOD DAMN IT, NOT ONE MORE WORD OF-"

"W.... William is, yours, he... B-but- Abigail-"

The gunshots rang out, excellent aim, in the middle of each rib cage, and Will screamed as his mother fell on top of Abigail, both of them shaking and trembling before falling limp after what seemed like an eternity. They were gone. They were gone.

But no, they hadn't. They were still there. Four of them, two standing and two lying down.

"Oh my God." His father said as his mouth dried out and his bare feet were glued to the floor, locking eyes with one version of his daughter that was lying prone and another who was walking towards her brother through her own dead body.

"Daddy didn't love me." She sobbed, her dark eyelashes wet with tears that were no longer making contact with the floor. "He didn't..."

"He wanted to." Jane tried to reassure her, but she was still crying too, the both of them in mourning for lives they were no longer allowed to live.

"What the fuck, what the fuck-" Garrett said, looking down at his gun and back at the spirits of the wife and child he had just killed, another gunshot going off near Jane's shoulder, hitting the base of the stairwell with a crack.

Will shook his head at the both of them, somehow ignoring the gunshot. Garrett didn't regret a thing, it seemed. He wanted them dead even after already killing them.

"No he didn't want to love you. I'm sorry, he didn't. I thought he did." He said, his voice small.

"Me too." Said both of them. Abby took his hand, sniffling into his shoulder. Jane pet his hair, smoothing it behind his ears like she always did. "I wasn't loyal, it's my fault."

Will looked at his mama with her hair in a bun, her skin so soft and a little wrinkled, so good at making him laugh whenever he slipped and fell to scuff his knee in the coarse rocks around the river.

"Can't... Can't be loyal to someone who never started loving you, mama."

" *I* love you." Said Abby, who'd just learned to spell the phrase in fancy calligraphy at school, and liked to write it on every surface she could, just to practice.

"I love *you* ." Will said to both of them, and he knew what it looked like in cursive but not many other words, since he'd always struggled with most letters looking sideways and upside

down.

He closed his eyes and thought about the first time Garrett had told him he loved him. It was a beautiful date night on the pier, and he was wearing his favorite yellow dress, making his brown eyes look gold under the streetlamps.

But that wasn't his memory.

He remembered the time Daddy pushed him on the swings so high that he had fallen off and landed on his feet and then his bum, and he didn't cry because big girls didn't cry, and he was really strong, but Daddy wasn't really impressed and told him to get back on the swing.

But that wasn't his memory either.

When he opened his eyes, Jane and Abby were gone, and he had a tiny hole, just like theirs in the middle of his ribcage, steadily dripping blood and staining his dark green shirt. It looked just like the ones Abby and Mama had.

But the pain wasn't there.

Garrett looked paler than a sheet, and turned the gun on him for the first time, his arm a blur, prepared to kill again, but the hammer fell with a dull click. Empty.

All Will could do was run, chest mysteriously weeping blood, eyes still streaming tears, hair unruly and obscuring his vision, and he panted and ran into the stream, where he'd always felt at peace and always felt like the only little boy in the whole world amongst the wilderness. This was the time, he thought idly, when he would find a little dog. A malformed mutt who had heard the sobs of a young one in the forest. This was when he'd be slowly and carefully brought into a small clearing, not too far, but smelling like wet fur and old breath.

But Buster wasn't anywhere to be found. Instead, Will ran headfirst into a tall boy with blonde hair, bizarre and offputing chiseled features and the pointiest teeth he'd ever seen.

The boy stepped back from him and smiled brightly, standing directly in a sunbeam. Light was cast upon the darkest of things.

"You hurt for others when they care not for the pain it causes you. You weep for everyone but yourself."

The shadow cast by him grew along the ground towards Will's feet until it fell entirely over his full body.

"Do you not wish to feel someone bleed for you?" The words were spoken smoothly just as the blood began to spill from the tall boy's mouth, pressing in to lean over his face, and Will suddenly felt sweet warmth, coppery and spiced like cloves and cinnamon slide into his open mouth and down his throat into the pit of his stomach, filling him with a horrible, burning ball of pure fire.

In Which Will Has A Ruff Go Of It

Chapter Summary

Hannibal bares his soul. (Kinda.)

Will's bite is just as bad as his bark. (Kinda.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As soon as Will woke up he started coughing, bile roiling inside of him, red-hot and stinging horribly as he barely managed to keep from throwing up. The repeating nightmare that he had so often, of seeing his family die again and again only for him to become their gate, had ended far differently this time - but now he couldn't quite remember how. He recalled flashes of sunlight, a warm cider, and feeling comforted, but confused. Usually during the dream he allowed himself to find refuge in the druids, but he didn't recall making it anywhere near the clearing.

There was more blood than usual, that was one thing. Somewhere, there was more blood.

Somewhere, he could hear a little girl crying.

He blinked blearily as he took in his surroundings, eyes landing on Hannibal and immediately softening, a sense of calm washing over him. He still felt a little uneasy, but this was far better than waking up alone, or in a pack of sleeping dogs that often didn't understand why he was upset. He gave an awkward smile to the doctor, clasping his hands in front of him.

"Sorry, I don't usually fall asleep in anyone's house after an ordeal like that. I more often than not at least make it to mine."

Hannibal was at his side immediately, rubbing a strong and assuring hand on his back as he coughed.

"It's quite alright, Will. No need to apologise for resting after the effort you put forth for me. As for your payment, you'll find it in your satchel - but before you go, would you mind terribly sharing lunch with me?"

"Oh no, you don't need to pay me." Will said, struck at the thought. "I still trespassed and broke your window. Consider it a service for what I broke."

He sat up straighter in the chair, suddenly famished. "I would... Really like to have lunch with you." He admitted, a little flustered that the man had not only seen him work, but had seen what a mess he was... Probably smelled the odors all over him too, for that matter, and he was still interested in him and not completely revolted. It was unlike someone so high in status to even look in his direction too long, much less to heal him, feed him and let him sleep in his parlor.

Hannibal's hand on Will's back paused in it's assuring circles and he gently withdrew it, returning Will's crooked grin with a soft quirk of his own mouth. He saw flashes of Will's dream, as well as the young version of himself from the painting.

He saw Will's younger sister and mother, murdered by the hands of his own father and the heat of hatred sparked within his chest, pooling across his muscles and making his jaw clench shut.

No one would ever harm Will like that again. He had seen the druid so young and vulnerable with everything taken from him... Now it was Hannibal's turn to give to Will. He wanted Will to know he had found someone to bleed for *him*for once.

Perhaps sensing this thought in a part of himself, Will held a hand up to his forehead to try and feel the cut there, but could only sense a thin raised line under his fingertips, barely perceptible.

There had to be some sort of catch, said the back of his mind, growing weary with more and more questions added on top of questions.

Hannibal stood and then looked back at Will, his face bright and brimming with satisfaction despite his composed demeanor. The sun shone around him, through his flaxen hair like a halo, the house filling with the warmth of its master. It felt calmer than before. Lighter. He had Will to thank for it. For the first time, Castle Lecter was truly and properly his.

"Please keep the payment as a gift." He offered, immovable. "Additionally, I look forward to cooking for someone again. It has been quite some time since I've had guests of the living." He chuckled and lead Will back down to the kitchen. It had been cleaned up from the earlier exorcism.

"I hope this doesn't seem insensitive," Will started, knowing what he was about to say would very much be insensitive, but he wanted to ask regardless, "but have you ever considered that the reason you spend more time alone is that you may carry some kind of curse with you? That perhaps attracts spirits to your house, or gives you... Uh..." He twisted his fingers by his side. "Tendencies?"

"Perhaps it's just your magic? I've noticed you have quite a knack for spells." He remembered the pitiful excuse for prestidigitation that he had attempted earlier and scowled just slightly.

"Hmm. If I was cursed, what do you think would be the source?" Hannibal asked conversationally while he removed his overcoat, hanging it up on a hook on the wall and takin down a crisp white servant's apron to tie about his waist.

He face was calm and slightly clinical, eyes trained on Will as he motioned for him to have a seat at the counter before he began his prep work, sharpening the very knife that had been flung at his head not three hours before.

"With paranormal infestations, it is quite common for the source to be," he gestures vaguely about the air with the blade of his knife, "The house, the land itself or even," His eyes met Will's again, the contact creating an electric buzz of energy between them. "The occupant. Which is it that you believe?"

(This was all very amusing to him. Will had all but solved his little "ailment", but hadn't quite made the correct connections yet.)

"I acquired my magical abilities through treacherous study of the occult when I was a young boy. Dark magic, specifically. Some things when summoned out of pure, unfiltered desperation can plague a man for as long as he walks the earth."

Will had been about to make his vague guesses on situation and contrast when Hannibal mentioned dark magic, making him nod slowly, the gesture turning slowly and gingerly into the opposite, shaking from side to side.

"You never stopped using dark magic, did you?" He said, caution in his voice. "You can't possibly tell me that this... This aura lingered about your skin for all those years? Dark magic can wear away after an age, but if you learned it as a young boy I can't imagine you were eager to stop." He looked up at Hannibal, searching. "Dr Lecter, dark magic is addicting, it's consuming. No wonder your house is..."

He stopped talking, holding a hand up by his face. "No, no no - this isn't a lecture, please excuse me. I'm certain you know the risks, but you don't necessarily seem worse off for taking them."

Hannibal feigned hesitance to continue, like it was painful for him to remember. He took the time to choose his words carefully, rifling through events to select particular truths as he spoke while maintaining a soft and vague melancholy, his eyes accented with pain.

"May I be honest with you? Can I trust you with that?" The question was compelling, begging for an understanding between friends. Will bought this readily.

"The aura remains strong to this day because I no longer simply *practice* dark magic. I am a creature created and molded by it. I am the source, Will - what I summoned as a boy changed me for eternity and it is a burden I shall walk with for my full existence. That," A strong hand gently clasped over Will's on the counter, cold as death, "is my curse."

Will's eyes softened, dark eyelashes fluttering as Hannibal touched him. It had become a familiar cold to him, what was once a chilling, uncomfortable feeling now was akin to a brush against metal left out in the winter, strong and reliable.

He nodded down at the hand, fixated on it as he thought. They were the same, alone and left only with their abilities coaxed into creation when they were too young to realise they even made a mistake in the first place. What was a blessing then was a complication now.

Will licked his lips. "I'll keep your secret if you keep mine." He said, folding his shirt open, which was now dusted with salt and his own blood, to reveal the sigils in charcoal on his chest.

"One of these is fake, I don't use it." He admitted, before taking a cloth that Hannibal had on his countertop, licking it to wet it and sliding it over one of the charcoal sigils to expose a scar shaped exactly like a bullet hole would leave. It was white and messy and ugly, and had not healed well under the care of wild animals, but he'd survived.

"I don't really know what it is, but I think it's some kind of dark magic as well. It manifested during the death of my only family and the betrayal of my father." He stopped studying the scar to look up at the doctor. "I was barely ten. We're the same in that, aren't we?"

With the fluttering of Will's lashes from his touch, Hannibal saw the dark, torn feathers of falling Lucifer. Crystal blue eyes filled with the agony of abandonment, brimmed with sparkling tears that floated upwards with the momentum of the fall.

"Is there a mark on your back as well?" Hannibal's voice was deep and rougher sounding now, the beast tugging at it's chains. Will shook his head slowly in response.

He examined the scar and the body around it carefully. The mark on Will's chest was surrounded by blues and greens in his vision, a signifier of untapped power. That explained it then - He'd been seeing it pulse and roil, stirring inside Will and radiating a contained, caged force.

"I was thirteen." Hannibal met Will's eyes, the flames of his nightmare flickering there now. "I believe we will have many secrets between us. You can trust me to keep this one, not to mention the rest you may offer."

Hannibal's eyes changing drastically when Will spoke didn't escape him now. He had noticed it before, the shifting under the lights as many eyes often did, but never like this. The way he bled here was an odd sort of enchanting, and allowing himself to be distracted by then was suddenly not a threat, but pleasant and comforting.

Will tore himself back into his own mind when Hannibal pulled back as well, catching him in the act of admiration. He glowed, here. All angles and glaciers and rising tides, baffling grace and poise in the midst of such a cruel curse.

"Your eyes bloom like roses." He said, regretting it immediately and standing up, almost crashing their heads together with the extreme movement.

"I'm going to go wash my hands." He offered in monotone, and headed to the kitchen sink.

Hannibal's face went neutral once more, withdrawing from the intimate moment regretfully when Will stood. He focused on his preparations again, the compliment echoing about his

mind as well as the flush of Will's cheeks.

With Will's back turned, Hannibal flutters about at a silent and inhuman pace, retrieving dishes and setting places for the two of them with maroon linen place settings with crystal goblets that he filles with aged red wine. From the ovens in the warm adjacent room he pulled braised beef steaks that he had kept broiling. He smiled as he stirred roasted vegetables, quickly satisfied with those, and returned to the counter, letting the meat rest on the cutting board. He was back before Will was done at the sink, so focused on his task he hadn't noticed that he stopped masking his normal movement.

Swirling his glass and holding it under his nose briefly and sipping it, there was a small twitch at the side of his mouth. Perfect. This was perfect. *Your eyes bloom like roses*. With those words, Hannibal felt possessive. Will Graham had made his heart beat, bleeding others' lives through his veins.

Will poured water out of the jug at the sink and wet his hands, running them over the sponge that sat in the dish and scrubbing at the charcoal under his nails. He was such a fool, such an idiot to let himself get consumed by the man's natural romantic aires, his soft words and haunting glances. There was no use in such a thing, was there? To have some sort of odd fling with a Count - because that's what it would be. A fling with a dirty boy filled with spirits and a dark-magic wielder with all the power and money he could want who chose to sat idle in his castle on the hill.

Will was running four monologues at once before he took a deep breath, letting it out as slowly as he could. No use. No use for anything he was doing here for him or for the Doctor. He needed to move on before he messed anything up, to preserve the friendship he'd made already and not try to complicate anything with this very real, very human connection that he'd wanted for years with someone who was real and… Genuine.

"Will... There is another spirit on this property that may require your assistance in passing on. Have you heard her?" Hannibal asked, knowing he could every day, recalling easily the fearful weeping of a young girl. Mischa. His voice is soft, "She cries, daily. I have become accustomed to it, but it is not enough to make it background noise I can ignore. It won't ever turn to that, I fear."

"I heard her." Will echoed back, remembering the sounds he had heard on the grounds and looking at the meat that sat on the counter instead of the roses that called him back to them.

"In the forest, I heard her. Is she a relative too? She sounds lonely." He realised it as he said it. It sounded sad at first when he'd considered it alone out by the cherry trees, but in hindsight...

"She's so young." He added, soft.

Hannibal gave a single somber nod. "She is both of those things. Many years ago she was lost to the darkness of the forest. She cries for the loss of her elder brother and she searches for him there."

He sliced the steaks, serving the beautiful meat onto black china gilded with gold. He took his time and delicately plated their meal before wiping his hands on a towel and untying his apron in order to place it on a nail.

"Braised beef steaks served with roasted mixed vegetables in a cabernet reduction." He said as he set the beautiful plate gently infront of Will. The meat was sliced delicately in a fan on the black plate framed with vegetables.

Will took a bite and was immediately surprised by the bold flavor, expression freezing as he let it wash over his tongue, hypnotized.

"Wow, this is... The best thing I've eaten in ages." He said with a disbelieving chuckle, taking another bite of the scrumptious meal immediately and chewing eagerly. He looked up at Hannibal between bites, trying to compose his expression as it was torn between his response and enjoyment of the food. The man's face was pleased, obviously happy to hear it.

"Sorry, the girl - i'm afraid if I were to visit another spirit or offer it any peace I'd have to wait another day. I'm exhausted, I don't have energy for another spirit." Will added, and he realised that he felt slightly guilty for it, to not be able to be useful to Hannibal or offer him any sort of assistance.

"Not to worry." Hannibal said. "Today all you have to do is eat your lunch and I'll let you continue about your life. I need nothing from you, I simply delight in the pleasure of your company. Your power is… a bonus." He takes a bite of the steak and shuts his eyes in satisfaction, enjoying fragmented memories of Jacob McCophy in a wooden chair as his life poured through glass tubes and collected into Hannibal's wine bottles. Absolutely delicious. He had, of course, added *his* special ingredient to Will's - but it was decadent with or without it, and his own dinner lacked the ingredient.

"I'm pleased you like the food, though. I love to cook and I haven't had the occasion in some time to cook for someone other than myself. I hope you come to make it a habit." His tone was friendly, eyes flicking to Will's face to watch him devour his meal, strangely canine.

Will was barely clued in on the fact that his eating was a bit sloppy, uncaring for the wine reduction on the corners of his lips, pulling it away and back onto his tongue with his thumb.

Giddiness prickled along Hannibal's spine as he watched Will eat. The man in front of him had the table manners of a dog - A polite one but a dog none the less - and Hannibal was finding great amusement in it. He thought back to the exorcism where he could see animalistic forms bubble just under Will's skin for but a moment.

"So, did you go to a fancy rich man's school for the culinary arts as well? Graduating with honors, no doubt." Will teased him dryly, one eyebrow raising into his hairline.

Hannibal couldn't help himself but indulge Will. The man's tone was practically flirtatious and Hannibal wondered then if Will realized how friendly he had allowed himself to get with him - it was positively delectable. Hannibal had drawn in a man who just the day previously wanted to bolt so desperately from his home he had lept from the bloody window, and here he was practically flirting with a man he had just found wasn't possibly human.

"Cooking was a skill I acquired through necessity when I was young. Time passed and I developed that skill from a necessity to an art." Hannibal sipped his wine gently, "How is it that you acquired such skills as Beast Shape? Do you hail from a family of Druids, Will?"

The smirk dropped slowly from his face, and Will's gaze went back to his food immediately, staring at it like an antique artifact. It was almost completely gone, but his mind was racing. How could Hannibal possibly know? He hadn't shifted into anything near the manor, he hadn't discussed any of his family out loud - the last time he'd used his wild shape was before he met Hannibal at all.

His fork hit his plate with a quiet clink as he reprimanded himself once again, the progress Hannibal had made with him slipping under the cracks of his impassive face back to the nervous, paranoid man from when they barely knew each other.

One secret. One secret he was supposed to keep for himself, one thing he wanted to guard for his own safety, something he had kept from every single human he'd come into contact with, and he'd somehow let it slip to his first friend in years that he was a Druid. He was already dirty and scruffy and uncultured, but to face this dark magic sorcerer-warlock-wizard whatever he was as a Druid was not something he'd prepared himself to do.

To be so utterly and intimately torn from his soul in order to be plastered onto a signpost that said exactly what he was was jarring. What didn't this man know about him now? He basically knew his full powerset and full name, and in this world, what else was there to know?

These thoughts were practically nonsensical. He realised he was panicking too late, his heart rate spiked.

"Are you always this intrusive with people you've known for twelve hours, Doctor Lecter? Or do you wait until they seem even the least bit intrigued by your overabundance of pretentious hobbies first?" He said with bubbling acid in his voice, taking all of the food left on his plate in one forkful and inhaling it without chewing with one swallow.

Hannibal blinked, his posture unwavering. "I was simply making conversation. I hadn't meant to be invasive, I simply observed the beginning of your transmutation ability while you worked. It swelled with a stunningly beautiful power, purely natural... I could see fauna ripple under your skin. I have a practiced eye for magic, Will, I didn't mean to reveal a secret I had no way of knowing you were keeping."

Hannibal folded his napkin and placed it on his empty plate, looking Will in the eyes, "Heaven forbid we become friendly." The eye contact had a heat to it that was more than friendly - it was damn near intimate.

Will felt reprimanded like a child, as if a petulant grade-schooler one year above him had learned everything Will was working on in class, and had just smoothly run him over with all the knowledge Will had barely grasped yet.

Beautiful. Fucking beautiful. No one actually thought that. Hannibal was covering his ass.

And... Will was being immature.

He glowered down at his plate, flexing his jaw and taking hold of the plate between a forefinger and thumb, sliding it forward gently as the porcelain scraped over wood.

"Can I please have some more food."

"Of course you may, Will." Hannibal stood and took Will's plate from him, moving to place a heavier helping of meat upon his plate. Will was quite lucky that Hannibal had taken such an intrigue in him. The last person who spoke to him that way was occupying a cask in the wine cellar, labeled to not be opened for a full century - the very cellar that was not 100 feet from where they were now, hidden behind a heavy door at the other side of the boiler room.

Hannibal then gently placed the plate back down in front of Will and moved to clear his own.

"Are you often weary of people, Will? I imagine in your line of work, getting close to those who are physical and tactile is more of a challenge than opening yourself as a gate for spirits to cross onto their paradise. You seem to experience empathy for the dead to such an extreme... Do you find it difficult to connect with flesh and blood the same way?"

Will squinted at him, mixed with being irritated and amused, at this point. Hannibal was arrogant to the point of being obtuse, it seemed. The druid paid special attention to the way he ate his own food this time with perfect manners, eyebrows drawn over his eyes as his pupils rippled back and forth, irises filling the whole cornea like a wolf, into slits like a goat, a snake, a tiger.

"I find it as difficult to connect with people as you do, doctor." He said simply. "Neither of us are around flesh and blood often - and the spirits don't require much tact. Plus, more often than not, you often have complete control over the situation. Once that control shifts, it's hard to connect because vulnerability is foreign. It's unnecessary when you don't often use it as a tool for yourself, and are accustomed to seeing it in front of you."

Hannibal considered this. "I find it quite simple to connect with people as long as you present yourself in a way that those very same people find appealing."

Will was rude in a way Hannibal found appealing, which was interesting because it had been so long since anyone had been so unafraid of him. Even when he went into the city, there were many bright-eyed people who avoided his glances and kept false means of protection close to their chest simply out of superstition that happened to go hand in hand with effective self preservation.

The Count on the hill. A shy doctor who's family occupied cursed and haunted land, the source of rumors and suspicion among the peasant folk.

"As if wearing a costume, we dress in attire to present ourselves in a way that the general people of the world find acceptable, masking our true selves for the sake of the comfort of others."

Hannibal finished his wine and crossed his legs, hands folded over his knee, relaxed. "And perhaps at times, the comfort of ourselves." The last part rang through the air with a clear implication of absolutely nothing that had been spoken out loud.

"Everyone perceives themselves that way, I think." Will said, idly resting his elbow on the table and leaning into it.

"Everyone thinks of themselves as this awful thing that no one should look at. A small amount of them think they're worthy of love, or praise. It's when you actually look at the group of people that are truly horrific inside, just... Awful, repulsive, that you find individuals that don't even try to wear any sort of costume. That's who you really have to worry about. The people who hide themselves only for the comfort of their own psyche, because being themselves would make everything unnecessarily complicated for their life. Pure ego."

Did he care what other people felt, he wondered? Did he have any sort of motivation to love? It was after a short amount of pondering that he landed on yes, he did. Will liked safe people. He liked keeping them that way, keeping them safe. He wasn't into the interpersonal aspect of people though - that was complicated and unnecessary. Annoying, if he was honest. He found most people petty, their person suits for ego alone.

That train of thought twisted and darkened in his mind as he wondered if some people really deserved to be able to wear a person suit, if it was because they lived only for themselves. You didn't have to like people to love them, to live carefully around them.

His eyes had glazed over as he thought, and he looked back up at the doctor, suddenly incredibly curious. "When do you put on your person suit, Doctor?" He asked, plate clean, his entire attention on the other man.

Together slowly, blood red blossomed in Hannibal's irises once more as the corners of his mouth pulled over his teeth - four sharp points, two on each side of his blunt front teeth. The bicuspids were sharp and slightly shorter than the much longer, sharper canines.

There is a dark ominous shift around Hannibal. The warmth of his sunshine muted by sheer intimidating power. The smile is dangerous. A flash of the same smile dripping blood from the boy in Will's dream glimpses over Hannibal in front of him.

"Mine is firmly in place for those who dare not glance beyond structured and composed stitching. What about yours, Will? When do you don your person suit?"

At this Will couldn't help but stare at Hannibal's mouth, his pink pouting lips surrounding hideous, jagged, dangerously beautiful teeth that looked like they'd tear into him. He imagined the man taking him by the jaw, muttering incantations under his breath, that purple-blue magic swirling around him gently, powerfully lifting him as though he were weightless, and sinking them slowly into the meat of his hip at the bit of fat between his stomach and ribs, tearing it out furiously with a growl. Will wanted to reach in with his hands and hold his mouth open, to stare down the maw of this dragon and hold him docile, his own blood swallowed messily down Hannibal's red throat as he held the powerful beast to revere him, studying him.

He was back to himself in a flash, wondering what had come over him - knowing full well any normal person would see such a horrible sight and turn tail, but instead he blushed, mortified at the invitation.

Hannibal was terrifying. He would make a mortal man sink to his knees with this vessel, one he had stumbled upon in early years and cultivated for two decades. He was powerful and stunning. Will... Was... Well. He could be if he wanted to, if he really wanted to, but the form he was most comfortable in...

"W-- Uhh..." he said, holding a hand over his mouth as a flush began creeping even down his neck, suddenly embarrassed.

"Shit, Hanni- Doctor Lecter, that's... Breathtaking. I'm really afraid that in comparison..."

He stumbled over his words in a mix of flustered emotions facing such a creature, knowing his own form, created by a lonely ten year old wanting solace and comfort, couldn't hold a fucking candle to this, not now or ever.

Hannibal was absolutely taken. Red eyes looked past the surface of Will's skin to see the hot glow radiate from his heart as it pumped with a sudden ferocity of embarrassment. Orange, red, and yellow pulsed and undulated as blood pushed rapidly through Will's veins, and he saw every movement of the millions of blood cells as they began to pool in Will's chest, throat, and face.

"I can, you know. Change into anything I want, just ask." Will said, clearing his throat.

Hannibal's breath hitched at the offer, leaning forward with clinical but clearly delighted interest. Anything probably wasn't true, magic users were often limited to transforming themselves into things that they have seen with their own eyes or were practiced enough to turn into anything they have read about or vaguely understood. He wanted to know which Will was.

Hannibal took in a breath through his nose, taking in the man who's scent he had grown to quite enjoy, of deep, moist forests, maples and evergreens along the stony banks of a bubbling stream. He saw Will there with his family, bounding through shallow water after fish.

A pack of misfits and strays mixed with delightfully beautiful and powerful creatures.

"I would love to see you as a Dire Wolf when we are not limited to the confines of my kitchen." He chuckled, delighted in Will's growing ease with him once more. Just a bit closer.

Will grit his teeth, frustrated. "Yeah, I can do that, I just...." He resisted slamming his forehead on to the table. Hannibal knew, he fucking knew that pretending Will was holding back this great, impressive thing would make him reveal himself. It wasn't impressive. His natural, practiced and comfortable form wasn't a Dire Wolf, that wouldn't be embarrassing.

He stood up slowly, locking eyes with Hannibal's crimson gaze, terrifying and threatening.

"If I... Show you myself." He whispered, consonants clicking against the roof of his mouth. "You can't..... Laugh."

"Will, I would never dream of being so rude as to laugh at you. Perish the thought, dear boy. Please." Hannibal watched Will, all of his attention boring into him through interested flaming eyes. His voice even but assuring. "I would be so honored to see you."

Will took a deep breath. Exhaled. Stared at Hannibal.

"I was ten." He said finally - before his hair started growing inwards on his head and outwards on his face. His legs and arms shifted to the correct lengths. Tawny fur sprouted over his nose, growing down from his eyebrows, bright blue eyes glowing with energy.

It was like sinking into a warm bath, this form. His limbs relaxed, his whole body warmed as his temperature went up, shedding his clothes as he shrank to half his size. His ratty clothing pooled around his paws and he shook, the long hair over his body curling like the hair on his head but settling. soft, cloudy ruffles were the only thing Hannibal could see as Will turned into his only other true self, his comfort space, his spirit.

A fluffy brown dog with awkwardly long legs stepped nervously around the table to look up at Hannibal, sitting down and clicking his claws into the hardwood floor, pink tongue flickering over his nose.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and you'll give Will a treat.

Here's what Will looks like, by the way.

https://twitter.com/PrinceWellMatt/status/1309216886123646986?s=19

Thanks for reading!!!!

In Which We Find Little Mischa

Chapter Summary

Hannibal tries again to bare his soul but he's really, really not good at it. Like jeez. Mischa is afraid of the dark. Will tries to justify the unjustifiable.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal's eyes widened as his heart squeezed tight in his chest, long delicate fingers gently pressing to his lips as he failed to repress the sheer affectionate grin that spread over his face.

"Oh, Will."

The (now *very* much) taller man caught his lower lip in his teeth as he truly *tried* to fight off a smile of utter giddy delight. He leaned down gently to extend his hand towards Will with a questioning hesitation.

"May I?"

Will sneezed, as dogs were prone to do if they were displeased, giving a high pitched yip at him. *You think I'm funny*, it said. You think it's funny that I'm a fluffy, helpless mutt that is eager to scarf down things that smell good, dip his paws in the stream and roll around with his brothers and sisters without a care in the world - only having a mind for comfort and sweet, simple pleasures because a dog needn't worry, a dog had no cares. Will had spent his time in this form for years. It had taken a lot of coaxing and self hatred to get himself out and back on two legs.

Hannibal's hand was struck by his long-clawed paw as Will wobbly smacked him down with another sneeze.

"No, you can't fucking pet me." he said, but it wasn't spoken aloud. His wild shape communicated through a connection of thoughts alone, ideas and concepts forming in other's heads that translated well enough into words, no matter what species. It was nice, but only within the parameters of people you wanted to communicate with, and tended to be inconvenient during a hunt, if the prey sensed you before you showed face.

The message was received, and Hannibal withdrew his hand immediately, managing to still look within the highest spirits possible.

"I apologise - obscenely rude of me to ask." He said gently, kneeling on the ground in front of The Will That Was Now Dog, sitting on the floor with him at a respectful distance.

"I assure you I'm smiling because I'm honored you shared yourself with me like this." His cheeks twitched with the effort to remain in check as he cleared his throat, feeling a foreign warmth there. It had been an age since he'd *resisted* the urge to smile. He hadn't found a good many things to smile about for many, many years.

"I simply wish to remain a man in your eyes." Will admitted. "I was adopted by a family of druids when I was ten. After... My family was killed." He said with a mental sigh, his big blue eyes surveying how Hannibal looked with the color profile he had now, with everything in muted grey and red. "The druids lived as a pack of wild dogs, but they spend most of their whole existence in those forms, almost never returning to human ones unless it's absolutely necessary. They taught me how to do the same and... Although much smaller then, I chose this form." His leg twitched as he felt his ear tingle, and he reluctantly brought it up to scuffle at the place to itch for a moment.

"A wild dog. I also got very good at acting like I had rabies." He added. "But it's not my true form. I could never get quite as attached to living like an animal as they did. Because of that I try my best to care for the little ones that make their way to the clearing, and show them the options druidic teachings use to shape a life, instead of how much being one[7] can limit it."

Hannibal felt as if he could see little Will, a small pup whimpering and kicking in his sleep with nightmares of the father that stole his family from him, and his heart ached. For the first time in centuries, he not only felt like it beat softly in his chest, but also hurt for another person. He hurt for the young boy bleeding from his chest out of a magical wound, pale trembling fingers touching the rapidly growing stain on his shirt and coming away the same color.

Half lidded eyes focused back on the dog in front of him. "In the loss of one family you gained another." He said simply, before raising one brow. "However it could be said that as children we have the firmest most unclouded sense of who we are, in our sense of self. Never be ashamed of who you are, Will. Even in adulthood."

"I'm not ashamed." Will lied, defensive. People thought of druids as these dangerous creatures, huge and towering bears with layers of teeth, or sneaking panthers that could quietly kill you in a swipe. The alternative were flighty, fragile fae that blended into trees, beautiful in the moonlight and glowing with power. He was neither and none of those things - he was scruffy and cute and weak to cravings for eating everything he could see. It wasn't any sort of impressive.

He didn't want to think about that anymore, so he shifted the topics. "I would consider my bond with my pack to be strong, but I'll always miss my little sister more than anything in the world." He thought of Abby, her hair always tied in the back, constantly being led by the hand wherever they went. Their father had hated her as soon as she was born, because she had green eyes, and neither he or her mother had green eyes. She'd been a very emotional little thing and Will would often hold her hand as she cried, going about his business anyways, fetching pails of water from the creek or slicing peppers carefully for supper with one hand.

They'd used to play at being dogs and cats. Abby liked to be held and pet, and Will liked to chase balls. It was an early little becoming for them together. He wondered sometimes if she could have escaped with him and found solace in the druids as well. Perhaps they would have made an acception to feline kind just once.

"I know I mentioned I was too tired to take care of the girl in the woods," he said, reminded of her plight and the big brother she looked for evermore. Perhaps to see someone who reminded him of Abby would help strengthen her memory for Will as well as assist the man before him.

"I'll admit I am still tired but... Could I see her? Could I visit her, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal's heart stopped, the newly refreshed warmth completely sinking from his body as the question turned to iron and dropped into his stomach. He had thought he had been spared at least one more day, 24 hours at least before he would have to step foot into the east forest.

He heard her and felt her every second of every day in the back of his mind, his heightened senses making her voice clear as she searched.

"Haaaanniiibbaaaall! Aahhah-aahhh... Hannibal where a-ah-re yoouu?" She'd cry, little warbles trembling with fear. He thought eventually that he would become numb to it, impartial to the sounds of her calling out for him where he left her for the beast to take her, eternal punishment for what he'd done… But after all this time he almost felt unworthy of the relief.

Hannibal swallowed and looked at Will. "I can take you to the edge of the forest where she is, but I… Dare not tread any closer. There are some places on these grounds that even I can't go for fear of my own memories."

Hannibal looked like he had been physically struck by his question, and it confused the hell out of Will. The doctor had been the one to issue the request in the first place, so why was he hesitant now, he wondered?

His mind threw itself back to the mentions he had made earlier about dark magic, sacrifice and the land they stood upon, and his own expression from what he could show on his scruffy face followed suit.

"You mean to tell me that you can listen to her crying, but can't ask her why?" He said, and it was honest, but blunt. "I'll go into that forest, and I'll find her, but... I need to know what I'm getting into, Doctor, I need you to tell me what happened, I can't do this blind."

He usually hated eye contact but it was odd to have the other man suddenly so staunchly against it. He stood on all fours to take a few tensive steps towards him - if anyone wasn't making eye contact it was going to be him, dammit.

"You see so much of me. Can't I request to see more of you?"

Hannibal knew he was right. The two of them had already agreed to trust each other, at least a little bit, and that was a new situation in and of itself. He hadn't made a promise of truth

before that he'd kept.

But Will stood before him here in his truest and most comfortable form, baring himself fully, and if he were himself but a week from this day, he would have made something up. There were so many elements that combined through hundreds of years to build and meld together to make up what he was, certainly far too much for Will to see all of at once, but Hannibal had never shown anyone a modicum of any of it. Was there harm in sparing a page or two from his mind?

"She isn't just a young girl, she's my sister." He said very suddenly, as if his voice could outrun his mind. "When I was young, I followed a path to gain power that I did not fully understand, so the beast within demanded a sacrifice to demonstrate my tolerance for true pain, said sacrifice being... Two souls."

Hannibal looked at Will now, and the druid felt as if he were a reflection the man was speaking to in order to justify such a confession.

"I had already prepared to sacrifice my own soul, but it also wanted the only thing I loved as well - My Mischa. As *reward* for my sacrifice, it let me "keep" a part of her, and It chose what I kept."

Hannibal decided he had shown enough. Pages felt torn out of him, wrinkled and faded, but they were there. Enough for now.

Will's body was frozen, his limbs locked. He felt like cool water was running through his veins, spilling over his muscles inch by inch as the realization settled in that Hannibal had, as a small boy, sacrificed his little sister for some... Some power, for some sort of magic? So because of that her soul stayed in the forest, torturing him with her wails, lonely and cold.

Bile rose in his throat, and his tongue ran out the side of his mouth as he cleared the taste. He thought of willingly giving Abby to her father in order to have *anything* in his life, and he knew he wouldn't have wanted it.

He didn't understand. Hannibal seemed hurt, and he didn't want to visit the woods, so he obviously felt some sort of guilt, but as a child he must have been so warped by his lived experiences and his powerlessness that there were no other options.

He licked again. This was a sight to see, Hannibal so open and aching in front of him, baring his sins and his anxieties. The man looked... Tortured. Will could have asked any question to confirm his theories about powerlessness, about retribution or a child's goals, but he stuck to something Hannibal had a chance of wanting to hear.

"What did it choose for you to keep?"

"The part of her that still weeps for me to save her from the dark of the forest. The part of her that screams when It finds her, over and over. The beast gifted me her last moments, imprinted on the land for as long as I would walk it." Hannibal said, but the information was said like it was a section out of a book, unaffected and scriptural.

The Count's chest was a bottomless pit that was presently being emptied of everything it held, the iron weight of his vulnerability drilling endlessly through his body. He felt her now in the forest manifesting as a soft feeling of endless loneliness in the gray of the trees. Where birch saplings had once stood hundreds of years ago, their descendents stood among an exchange of evergreens and hardwoods.

"I can take you." He said.

The concept of Will's pride for his canine form was washed away as he realized he wanted to see Hannibal smiling again, wanted to see his eyes crinkle at the edges, wanted to watch his teeth extend in that terrifying smile just like before. He took the steps he could to close the space between them, leaning down to butt his furry head against Hannibal's angled, strong shoulders.

"I can go by myself, Doctor. It's fine, I can hear her, I can go to her if it hurts you. I can't stand the thought of..." He heard Abby in his head, sobbing, so small and helpless in her last moments. Could he bring Mischa peace as well?

Hannibal paused a moment, quiet. "No, Will, I should accompany you. I believe it would be beneficial for me to do so." He let Will gently nuzzle into him and his muscles tugged and squeezed in his chest and stomach, almost making him withdraw from the contact because he hadn't been the one to start it. It was the first touch between them that he hadn't initiated, and he was surprised to find himself taken aback.

He drew in a breath through his nose and smelled Will's pack in his fur, their forest and his stream. It made the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

There was a moment before he gently withdrew from Will and stood, steadying himself. "It would be terribly rude as your host not to accompany you." He brushed down the front of his trousers and jacket, quickly regaining his steel grip on his composure.

Will looked up at Hannibal with a sardonic expression - the man was made of poise, and anyone who threatened his sense of himself probably would be looking at a face full of magic sooner or later.

He didn't press, and instead nodded, walking to the door just a little bit in front of Hannibal, padding over the hardwood floor with soft clicks.

The walk out of the castle from the kitchen was quiet as they progressed down the North corridor, out through a servant's entrance to the back oak doors. The courtyard was open with scattered statues in various states of wear and tear, and at the center was a fountain that once bubbled and spouted beautiful rushing water, now still and empty.

Hannibal brought Will up to the east treeline that sprung up abruptly on the edge of the courtyard in one sudden dense line made of thin brambling trees that held a dull fog around the trunks. From deep within they heard a distant and abrupt scream and that suddenly cut off.

Hannibal stopped dead in his tracks, eyes widening as the color that was left in his face completely drained, jaw clenched shut. His nostrils flared, a barely perceptible crack in his demeanor. He stood frozen at the tree line, eyes blankly staring into the woods in front of him.

Will watched quietly as he saw dread nearly physically strike Hannibal, feeling something else settle over him. He remembered belatedly that it was his second time today meeting a spirit, communicating with one, and he was completely exhausted. His mind had been through one too many things today, it told him.

But he had committed to this. He had offered to go and to meet with Hannibal's sister in the woods, and Will wasn't one to betray his own words, especially if they had been said but five minutes prior. He steeled himself, let his tail whap against Hannibal's legs.

"Alright, well..." He sighed. "Godspeed, Graham."

The fluffy brown dog was off into the woods at a trot as soon as he said it, not waiting for an answer.

Hannibal didn't stop him or call out. He remained at the treeline and let Will go. He didn't have to be directly there to witness anyway, he thought to himself as he stayed, staring blankly into the trees as Will became obscured by them. Slowly his form began to darken and sink, melding into the shadows of the trees.

He could feel every little tramp of Will's paws on the forest floor as he went deeper, searching for Mischa's presence. It was cool within the treeline, the heat of the summer sunshine muted under the canopy. There was life everywhere here. Butterflies flitted through sunbeams that penetrated the dense branches and leaves above. Cicadas humming slowly began to morph into the hiccuping cries of an unseen child.

She was so close now. Mischa's presence was unmistakably lonely in nature, and Will could feel her desperately searching as if an invisible restless head was on a swivel, searching for the boy that was imprinted on her memory, untouched by centuries.

"S-storebror?" Her voice was soft, calling out between her keening whimpers of despair. It was clear that she wasn't strong enough to make herself physically manifest... But that wasn't her purpose. She was forever searching this forest as a punishment, wails of pain and fear simply meant to torture the brother that had abandoned her.

The girl was a little glass panel, cracked through and spiderwebbed with silver-white veins, but she wasn't allowed to break, not now. Will looked up and around him, starting to pant. She had done nothing to be cursed to this life of pain. Something stirred in his stomach - he *knew* it was because of Hannibal, but he tried to convince himself otherwise, to justify it blindly. He started formulating excuses for him. The monster had played dirty, perhaps pulled out a trick. He had been taken over by darkness, leaving him with no mind of his own. He was thirteen and pure and looked down upon by what was perhaps a family that did not treat him well.

"Mischa?" He tried to say, using both of his voices, the most gentle sounds he could manage, high pitched and soft, ending in the slightest howl, his eyes still scanning and his ears perked for the slightest stirring.

There was bending in the air around Will as if the name had been acknowledged with a gasp, the atmosphere flexing as her presence solidified.

"H-Ha...Hannibal? Where... where are you?" She couldn't physically manifest, but she was there. Will could feel her.

She was focused at the base of a tree, nestled between a divot in the roots that separated and pushed deep underground.

"You.. are not Hannibal.." she said, disappointment laced into her words.

Will took a seat on his hind paws at the base of the tree, like he was sitting at a grave. He thought for a useless moment that it was a pity he hadn't brought flowers.

"No, I'm not. Hannibal is busy right now and can't come, but I'm... I'm his best friend, and I wanted to make sure if he couldn't come that I could instead while he was not around."

Talking to children had never been hard for him. To be fair, he'd always been worse at talking to adults. Adults had expectations. Children just... Accepted what was in front of them. They had no reason to hide, or to think you were tasteless, or to spit on you because you were dirty, smelly and hungry. You had to be carefully taught your expectations.

"Oh..." The disappointment washed over Will with a sharp ache in his chest. She had sensed that he had lied, as he had already started to spin his own soul and emotions through the air to try and connect to her.

He didn't see that Hannibal lied more than she liked. He didn't see how much it hurt her feelings, or that she knew he had told lies to Auntie Murasaki when she found him, Samurai sword slowly dripping crimson into the grass in front of the estate.

Auntie had grabbed Mischa's face then, covering her eyes, but it was too late. She saw the head that her elder brother gripped firmly by the hair. The eyes were open and glazed over, gray and sightless in death.

"He was saying crude things about you auntie, and threatening my life! He was very scary, I'm sorry. I couldn't forgive myself if I let him continue to poison the Earth with such filth, or threaten more lives than just mine." The tall boy flicked the blade over the grass, knocking away the excess drips of blood.

She had seen the man before. He had been rude to her and took her doll. She knew that Hannibal hadn't liked him much, after that. But she wasn't sure what else he had done

"Hannibal has... a friend?" Her voice quivered but sounded lighter, "HHe needs friends.. I used to be his friend, I think. Not like Chiyoh though, she was my best friend."

"I don't have a lot of friends, but... He's one of the best." Will said, watching an ant crawl over the grass in front of him. "He definitely doesn't have many either. He probably really needed you... When you were around."

The ant tried to haul some little morsel or another over a leaf, shaking with it's tiny weight. "Are you still his friend now? After what he did? After what the monster did, I mean." He said quickly, trying to explain it better. He was letting his personal bias overwhelm him, it wasn't right, wasn't fair to her.

It was quiet here, if you listened past the calls of frogs and flies and angry little sparrows. Will tried not to think about himself, to focus securely on the moment and the girl in front of him. He could feel the prickle of tears that weren't his, the unseen girl quivering around the roots of the tree where her presence shrank in on itself as it acted on its urge to hide.

"You should run away. There is a monster out here…" The tiny presence was trying to diminish into nothingness that was unachievable. He curled up as close to the tree as he could, trying to offer comfort. The other pups always liked it when they could sit on his belly, warm and comforted in what safety he could offer them.

"I'm not scared of monsters." He said, not knowing if it was true or false.

She reached out almost immediately, the tiny presence growing and easing around Will, causing the fur where she was touching to rise from the static electricity. Her little spirit was faint and baby blue, and he could see it now, like a little wisp at the end of a stick of incense.

"Hannibal said he would come back for me, when we were playing... He knows I don't like playing outside in the dark. But when he did come, he looked different."

Children were so simple to love. All they needed was comfort, all they ever wanted was to know they'd be okay. Will shivered a little from her touches but stayed still, stayed there for her. The shivers started from her touch, but began to grow when he absorbed what she said entirely.

"What did he look like, Mischa?" He asked, suddenly wary.

Mischa quivered as the dense forest seemed to bow slightly in Will's vision, tension in the air flexing with memory of a great trauma. It was everywhere, seeping upwards from a layer of ash that then bled into the very tops of the trees.

Heat burned in the back of Will's mind as well, the great tempest of cruel and unnatural flames roaring behind his eyes briefly before the sounds of the young girl were swallowed whole by them.

Mischa reached into Will, to show him more.

Will was suddenly in the pitch black of the birch forest, the full moon arching high above the trees as the tall blond boy led him by the hand deeper into the forest. The hand was trembling but it was hard to tell if it was from his fear or from the mindset of the older boy. She wanted

to go back to play with Chiyoh again, she had never been scared with her. They were best friends, and she would never do anything like this.

Hannibal turned to Mischa and gripped her shoulders and his eyes were completely black in the darkness, brows upturned at the inner corners and the glint of tears brushing down his cheeks.

"Mischa..." His voice shook with fear as slowly from his back a shadow rose and began to take the form of a tall figure that separated from him as if it moved with Hannibal's very shadow.

Will could see nothing of any features of the shadow man, and it stood as tall as the trees. Light simply avoided it, and the eye did the same. It was uncomfortable to perceive, like a secret.

"Mischa." The young boy's voice cracked with pain as he shook Will by the shoulders, the feeling of fear immediately creating tears in Will's and Mischa's eyes. Every nerve in their body sparked to flee and to run from her brother and the Shadow Man that gripped Hannibal's shoulders tight from behind. Hannibal was bleeding from his throat now, blood staining his blouson a deep inky black in the moonlight, and his grip slackened around Will's shoulders.

"Run, Mischa! Now!! Run away!"

Scrambling to get to her feet, Mischa stumbled and began to run through the dark forest, branches cutting and grabbing at her gown and her face, tearing at her with tiny hands and claws like needles.

There was a bright red glow suddenly behind her that began to light up the forest and she felt heat on her back as she wailed and scrambled to get away before the monster took her. The inferno of black and crimson flames swallowed up her screams of terror before she could even dream of an escape, replaced with Hannibal's as they cried in tandem for the last time.

Will's eyes burned as he experienced the memory. He couldn't quite tell what was going on in his own mind's eye and neither had she then, seeing the inferno blaze and the shadow move like molasses, smooth and slow but methodical and dangerous. It was confusing and terrifying, for both of them and it made Will shudder with sadness and the betrayal he felt as a child.

"Thank you for showing me." He managed, but he still felt sick, starting to pant as his body overheated. Everything was unclear and hazy, but it would be cruel to ask anything to clarify now after a memory so significant had been torn from her little mind.

He knew the ease through which they connected was because of his gift, but now more than ever he wished he didn't have it, as they cried together at the base of the gnarled tree.

"I'm sorry." He told her, trying not to let the words seem as empty as they were.

Her presence began to fade against Will, withdrawing from him emotionally but still focused at the base of the tree. "The shadow man hurt Hannibal. He was bleeding and I left him all

alone."

There had been a sour sting plucking under the loneliness that pierced through all of what remained of Mischa's being, and Will recognized it now as guilt. Before she turned and ran, the blackness of the shadow morphed into and around her brother, and she heard him screaming as she ran away. She searched the forests for her brother as a cruel punishment for what Hannibal had done, thinking she left him behind and that she had left him alone to be swallowed by the beast.

"You did so well, though." Will said sadly. "He told you to run. There's... There's nothing you could have done to help if he had already decided what was going to happen."

He thought about the visions he'd seen, still trying to sort them out. He understood the guilt of trying to survive. He was different than Mischa only because he *had* survived. She had only begun to try. He ached to hold her and comfort her, knowing that Hannibal would feel the same. Hannibal had tried to help in some feeble attempt to gain her survival, hoping she could outrun what he had already promised. If she succeeded, he would fail, but he still told her to run. Was that cruel or was it foolish? Will still couldn't decipher any answers. He could only be there for Mischa as she told the first being she'd ever seen since she died what was wrong with her and how she felt.

"And now... I... I can't find him.. I wanted to go back for him." Deep blue waves of remorse wash over Will, an ocean made of centuries of mourning churning and swallowing up the forest around it. Though small in immediate presence her influence was a heavy fog of sadness over the Murasaki-Lecter grounds.

It was no wonder the air felt heavy just walking the road leading up the the gates.

"I'll tell you what." Will said, sighing. He thought of the Count, the man's angular face stricken with grief and mourning at the edge of the treeline, how he didn't let himself come any closer out of guilt and anger at himself. His sister's feelings mirrored him - she was scared, she wanted to find him safe and sound, she needed to see him.

"I'll find him for you some day, and I'll bring him here. I know where he is. I don't know... How long it will take, but I'll get him."

She wanted closure and to hear his voice and see he was safe. That was a reasonable goal, although the curse was a variable he'd never come across - if she was satisfied with seeing her brother, yet drawn to the forest by Hannibal's curse, what would happen?

The druid supposed they would just have to see.

The air flexed once more, the heaviness of grief lifting ever so slightly, a child's hope. "I could see him? Do you mean it? I want to, please."

Will stood. "I need to talk to him. He's still scared." He explained, still panting, still tired. Everything was so... Fucking exhausting.

"But I promise, I'll be back. We'll both be back." He set one paw against the tree like a child's pinkie promise, and howled softly like he did with Harley to make her giggle. "I'll see you soon."

"Okay." She said softly, and the wisp of smoke warmed over his fur with her trust.

Chapter End Notes

Bryan Fuller really said fanwork rights on Twitter recently and we couldn't thank him more for it. Honestly the activity of this fandom YEARS after the show ended is absolutely inspiring and that's why we're both still so connected to the series. So thank you for reading in 2020+! We see you and we appreciate you reading.

Matt and Bo

In Which We Introduce The Inspector

Chapter Summary

Jack and Will went up the hill...

Chapter Notes

This one took a little longer to edit because it's told in a few parts. A warning: this one's got a little spice. Just a little kick. As a treat.

Thanks for waiting!

It was rapidly approaching evening now, light fading among the trees and turning a grayish purple under the vast canopy of leaves.

Hannibal materialized from the darkness of the treeline as Will trotted out. He had waited for him while doing everything in his power not to feel or hear or see what had transpired within between Mischa and Will. A bloody fool he had been, thinking he could just waltz onto certain grounds of this estate after not touching them for centuries.

He looked now at Will, attempting a gentle smile. "How is Mischa, Will?"

"She misses you, Han-- Doctor Lecter."

Not one to beat around the bush but still trying to hold some modicum of respect for the man's title, Will looked up at him through his thick, curly eyebrows. That smile was bullshit, and Hannibal had been waiting there for longer than he let on, probably the whole time. Will could feel his presence, the dark purples and reds of his aura refusing to fade, swirling around itself like the stain of pigment in watercolor.

"If you want her to stop crying, I'm going to... You're going to have to come with me."

He saw the man's face change almost imperceptibly.

"But not tonight." He added with a long sigh. "I'm… so tired."

"It would be best for you to return to your family and rest, of course. You have done enough for me today and I am grateful for it." Hannibal said, and he was avoiding Will's eyes, looking straight ahead as monster and mutt walked next to each other toward the path to the road, the same route that Hannibal's stag had brought Will the night before.

"Will?" He stood at the gate as the exhausted druid turned to face him. He grinned, void of joy with glinting white teeth and glowing red eyes, bright against the shadows cast by his heavy brow.

"Call me Hannibal."

"Goodbye Hannibal." said Will, turning to take the path home with a swish of his tail.

Today had been very odd, he thought. He despised other people usually, but there was something about Hannibal that made him want to go back and help Mischa aside from her being a lonely spirit. He wanted to help Hannibal as well, even knowing that he was holding back about some prospects of his situation, knowing Will didn't have as much information as he did about dark magic. Was it true that if you contacted such things that you were completely imbued with it for the rest of your life? What about Hannibal's situation as a young boy drew him to that, something so horrible and awful that it made a common man shudder with fear just to get a glimpse of it?

If Will had taken one look at the dark shadows that now plagued Mischa's mind, he would have done the same as she did. He would have tried to hide. Perhaps he would have tried to fight, even - but he would never have seen the shadows as a friendly companion.

But enough about Hannibal, he reminded himself irritatedly. He'd done a bang-up job today, dammit. Plus, he'd left his clothes in the damn Count's house, and he didn't really make a habit of buying clothes, so he would have to go into town. Such an activity was something he only did as a human, but without clothes he couldn't very well just waltz into the tailors to demand them, so he'd have to steal some, which was... Arguably easier when he looked like a scruffy pup and couldn't be held liable for legal responsibilities.

An hour later, having wrestled a dark green shirt and pants from the bottom shelf of a very unlucky shop, he had found an alley to stuff them in an old left-behind canvas bag, trying to multitask. Town was outside of his pack's clearing but not too far, as the nomadic little tribe of druids knew what Will preferred to do and mostly followed him around, living much more simple lives. In return he would always try to give them nice things, and there was a bakery next to the clothing shop, which lead Will down a very simple trail of thought.

One by one he managed to evade capture, working to steal twelve pork buns (now slightly soggy from his mouth) and bring them to his canvas bag, only being caught when he picked the bag up and tried to trot out of town undetected. Followed closely by a heavyset and very angry woman, he ran as fast as he could to break free of her and the village, into the forest where he then found Winston and Harley waiting for him again, excited to smell his scent and tracking them down eagerly as they always did.

"Treats?" said Harley immediately, instead of jumping on him.

"Treats?" Said Winston, bowling over Harley in his excitement.

"Woof." Said Will, with a canvas bag very much in his mouth.

They entered the clearing and he set the bag down with a puff of air, barked to let the pack know that he had managed the day's treats, and shifted into his human form to put his new clothes on only when they were snuffling away at the crumbs.

Harley shifted into her little human form too, white-blonde skin and hair appearing from the peach pup's transformation and shining in the sunlight as she climbed into his arms and licked his face.

"I'm tired." Will said grumpily, holding onto the little druid and sinking onto a bed of grass that one of the wolves had put together, grunting as Winston, now also two-legged, jumped onto his chest. They liked to echo him often, never leaving his side unless he went on a trip. He was their provider, and though they self-identified as siblings he felt much more like a father to them.

"Oh, me too." Said Harley, chewing on his hair.

"Yeah, me too." Said Winston, debating on whether or not he should pee on Will's new clothes.

It took a very long time to get them to calm down, a trip to the river for a drink and a good game of "You throw it and i'll bring it back" for all three of them to be the right kind of tired (And for Will to nearly go comatose) before they were peacefully asleep in their pile, fitting against all of the other dogs like a warm, familial puzzle.

A dark figure lurked in the edges of Will's vision as he slept. There was no dream - just an empty nothingness that surrounded him. The area stirred and washed over him in true black, absent of light as it lulled and swirled as a void, closing in to completely engulf his frame.

Do you not wish to feel one bleed for you?

The words echoed through his subspace, and then everything was lit up by sudden flashes of glistening and wicked sharp teeth, a split black tongue running over the soft bowed lips that framed monsterous fangs. He saw the lower lip catch in the points of the left incisor and canine, digging into the plush swell of red flesh that then bloomed droplets of blood that warmed Will's nostrils with an unidentifiable sweet spice and dripped slowly into his panting mouth.

Burning hot thirst pooled in Will's gut and throat as a bleeding kiss and hot, coppery tongue slipped against his own lips, an intense heat teasing open Will's mouth and taking what it wanted. It was short but intimate, and the being made a contented sound of approval, dripping with a vicious and gluttonous hunger before pulling back.

Will writhed, suddenly famished, hunger pulling at the depths of his stomach lining as he starved, trying to crawl towards wherever it had gone, his hands outstretched, fingers twitching and scraping at his palms.

"No!" He cried, voice forcing its way out past his lips, throat pleading for release from a sudden unbearable, aching thirst. As the beast left an emptiness in the space he sat in, it

created something worse, so much worse inside of him.

"I need-- what did you *take from me*?"

His eyes searched through the darkness for purchase. A who, a why, a what... Anything his mind could grasp. It came back as soon as he spoke, this time from his fingertips, up his arms and putting gentle pressure on his neck and throat with it's spiced heat, graciously easing the dry pain of hunger. The plush of wet lips brushed against Will's again, words murmured against them in a puff of breath that smelled of a cool autumn breeze.

"I have taken nothing. What I intend to give, however..." The reverberating voice purred as it cloaked Will in a seeping dark warmth of desire.

"Give it to me, please. Something's missing." Will begged, and he brought his hands to the space in front of him, wanting to get as close as he could, needing whatever it was, familiar and warm and safe. His stomach and throat and mind all rang like a heavy metal bell hit with a mallet, sending him reeling.

"I'll give you everything, and you will want to take it." It began to slip away again and hot tears started to stream down Will's face as he shook his head. "Give it back, give it back!" He moaned low in his chest, but it was gone, it was taken, it was stolen, and he woke in a puddle of sweat and tears and urine, barely realising what was going on before vomiting onto the ground, completely covering himself in his own bodily fluids, disgust and shame pouring from his very pores as his family was left to wonder what sort of virus had wracked his body with such a disease.

"I will give you everything you need," Said the wind.

Interrupting the flow of foot traffic, the stack of newspapers bundled in twine was tossed down on the sidewalk of the busy street, a young cockney boy kneeling down and cutting the twine, freeing the top paper from the stack as he held it up to announce the headline.

"Whole Family Butchered In Their Home! Murderers On The Loose in London! Lock your doors folks, could be anyone next!"

The boy's cap slipped off his forehead as a tall man in a long tweed gray coat snatched the paper from his hands, eyebrows knit together in annoyance, "You're going to frighten people shouting headlines like that, boy!"

"I'm just reading the headlines, inspector, not my fault the police can't protect their citizens! It'll be two silver for that paper!" The young boy grabbed another paper off the stack and held it tight against his hip, glaring up at him.

The man wore a gray bowler hat that matched his tweed duster, his round and slightly scarred face twisted in irritation. He flicked a silver coin into the boy's gloved palm before turning and proceeding down the bustling street.

This happened to be Jack Crawford, a local inspector who had just been hired to front a new type of department - *Unnatural Crimes of Paranormal Nature.* It was a handful of syllables and a greater bundle of responsibility he'd presumed he was ready for, but ready he seemed as he stood in front of the Mayor, clutching his bowler hat in his wide hands.

Mayor Prunell was a distinguished woman who never had anything especially interesting behind her eyes that wasn't completely refined, most evident now as she stared coldly up at Jack. Her gaze was like ice, and they chilled him where he stood like an unwanted gust of wind.

"Yes well, Inspector Crawford, it seems your department has been lacking any real drive to get closer to solving *half* of these crimes that you claim to be... "unnatural"." She said.

Jack's face remained an obedient mask of a patient underling. He opened his mouth to say something but was cut off immediately.

"I am calling someone in to assist your investigations. Hopefully he will be able to shed some *competent* light in your department." Miss Prunell looked down at her desk, glasses low on her nose as she flipped through a leather ledger to find the information she was looking for.

"His name is Will Graham. He is a paranormal investigator I summoned to look into the freakish and bizarre happenings that have been regularly eluding your department."

"You called in someone to independently investigate my cases? Mayor Prunell, my department uses *science* to find evidence of unnatural deaths and crimes. We don't *ghost hunt* ."

"No, Inspector. I called in someone to *solve* your cases. Perhaps with his help you will be able to close something without leaving it cold. Now if you don't mind, get out of my office, find Graham and catch that bloody murderer before I do away with your whole department." Her voice made it clear this was final. The gruff man infront of her desk cleared his throat and nodded curtly, turning on his heel before letting himself out of her office.

Jack knew the name Will Graham, remembered him to be a strange and twitchy young investigator who had previously spoken with Jack very shortly when the department had first started to make headlines. The man had come in to interview but had derailed his questions and background check in order to make a long-winded speech about how there was nothing particularly "unnatural" about paranormal crimes or happenings and dubbing such things as "unnatural" continued to further a stigma against things of a magical nature. Jack shook his head to himself and chuckled a little at the memory. Mr. Graham was right of course, but he hadn't passed the interview. The man was clearly unstable and couldn't be considered amongst the lineup of people who had arrived on time and with their clothes washed - but working with him as a freelancer held nothing but untapped possibilities.

Will's family calmly led him to the stream after his rude awakening, bathing him carefully with their tongues as he washed his new clothes and joining him by the shore to sit happily by when they were set to dry. They made their noise, their snuffles and howls, and Will was happy to let them be as affectionate as they wanted until they got bored and ran off to play or

hunt away from him, other than Winston who preferred as always to stay by his side whenever his elder was near enough for him to reach.

Will was still scrambling to try and make sense from his dream, feeling echoes of hunger, hearing the sounds of the familiar voice in his ears, thrilling and delicious. Something had pressed against his mouth and taken something away as it departed, but he still couldn't figure it out, couldn't decipher what was missing. What was more, at the end the being had insisted it would *give* him something, and that hadn't taken it at all.

Whatever it was, Will knew he wanted it. It was part of him, he needed to get it back and that's what made him sick. He would get it back, if he could simply figure out the first step.

He must have been spending too much time in some very haunted woods, he thought to himself with a shudder. Could it be that the monster who plagued Mischa had somehow found him too?

One step he knew he could take for progress in *something* was to tell Jack Crawford that the castle on the hill shouldn't be approached. It was maintained by a man disinterested in any sort of expansion of his boundaries, and he'd probably come sooner or later on his own time. It wasn't necessarily urgent, as Will seemed to be the only person interested in making the trek towards Hannibal Lecter's property anyway.

With a promise of return with something good to eat and not to get himself any sicker, Will departed in slightly damp clothes to town to find the Bureau of Unnatural Crimes of Paranormal... God, something. They needed a better name.

As he traipsed in past the city square, the tailor, and the baker, he entered a tiny building just off the police station that the city had allowed Crawford to designate as his own. Acknowledgement of magic was not a rare thing to witness, as everyone mostly agreed that it existed, but the dangers of a well-managed skill were unknown to most. Non-magical humans tended to keep to themselves, preferring to live without the complications of the stuff in their lives, and segregation was often found, but never insisted upon.

"Inspector Crawford?" Will called into the two separate office rooms past the front door, letting the bells jingle behind him as it closed with a thunk.

"Mr. Graham." Jack Crawford stood from behind his desk politely in greeting, shaking Will's hand firmly in his before gesturing for him to sit, "Please sit down. It's a pleasure to see you again."

Jack knit his fingers together and looked over the disheveled young man, one of his eyebrows cocking in a clear skepticism. "So, Will- May I call you Will?" He looks up from his paperwork, forehead slightly wrinkled with the question.

"Sure." Will answered, sitting and bringing his legs up under him.

"Mayor Prunell has told me that she called you in to investigate sightings of a monster... A monster which," Jack flips through a file on his desk, "Many claim to be the Count of Castle Lecter. What have you discovered in your investigations post interviews?"

The man in front of Will was all business, straightforward and honest. It was clear that he wanted to investigate any claim no matter how insignificant, and it was also clear that Jack Crawford was the direct cause of him having to take 15 interviews in one day and investigate claims that held next to no standing. Very charming.

"Count Lecter is there alright, but he's not a monster." Will said decidedly. "I guess I didn't ask him, but I'm assuming he's a bit of a recluse. Lives up there on his own. What you should be worried about isn't the Count, but the spirits surrounding his castle."

He thought of flowering crimson eyes, dark tales and a rocky past filled with trauma, mind wading through various conversations and rocky paths through cherry trees. The stag that Hannibal had conjured for him stood out stark against each memory as if it had imprinted itself.

He thought of the missing piece inside of him.

"I think I may have come across something in the woods. Something inhuman, but definitely not a Count."

"An inhuman spirit on the property? Perhaps some kind of demon or poltergeist?" Critical eyes studied Will's face as he spoke. The young man had been on the Castle grounds and then came back unscathed, with the reclusive count even going so far as to speak with Will. No one had reported a conversation with the man in years.

"Did you gain insight into the history of the property? Any.. deaths or accidents? Strange rituals or seances with the dead?"

As Jack spoke, Will lost his vision briefly, black and red flames filling his mind with the screams of the monster who not moments before had been a young boy.

"Will?" The inspector's deep voice cut through Will's thoughts. He snapped his fingers expectantly into Will's face as he finished the question the young man hadn't heard.

Will felt like he had just stopped spinning, vertigo suddenly kicking in hard.

"Huh? Uh-- Deaths, rituals and seances... I'm not sure to the extent, but yes, there have been deaths. I took care of one spirit yesterday, the spirit of a woman from three generations prior." Will said. He remembered the way Hannibal had taken care of him after, had treated him like fragile frosted glass, his eerie fingers cold from dark-magic upon his face.

"There's also something I'm trying to take care of in the woods, but I have little to no idea what it is." He pressed his head into his hands, palms digging into his eye sockets as he tried to shake off the vertigo. He knew whatever it was in the woods it had to be some sort of magic tied to Hannibal's past, but that seemed like a private detail he didn't need to divulge. Jack was doing nothing to help but sending him up the hill with his tools and a pat on the back, so why should he be privy to such information?

"What did you find in the woods?"

"Something obviously imbued with dark magic. I'd say the whole grounds was covered in it. Staying there for extended periods of more than a few hours is making me sick, I think." Will said, picking up his journal and looking through it just for something to do.

"There is a dead little girl in the woods." He tacked on as if he were discussing the weather. "She screams and cries every day so loud you can hear her, so I went to her and talked with her. I didn't have the energy to spend all of my time in the woods, so after I talked to her I.... Left."

Saying that now felt irresponsible, he mused darkly.

Jack's eyebrows shoot upward in surprise, "And it's making you ill? My God..." As he wrote, Will could see gears turning in his head, brows furrowed together in concentration. "It's incredible that a single human can live up there all on their own, especially in a grand estate like that... I assume you spoke with the Count?"

"I don't find it too unreasonable. I'd suppose he probably makes a trek into town once in a while for survival materials and then walks back." It sounded like a perfect existence to Will, if anyone were to ask him what he preferred.

"I did exchange a few words with him." Understatement of the century. "His full name is Hannibal Lecter, he's a doctor." Will didn't go into exactly how he'd figured out the man was a doctor either.

"As far as the illness goes, the forest is filled with dark spirits. I'm assuming that prolonged contact with them is causing complications, but it's not that big of a deal."

Frustration filled his mind, rippling through him like wind through tall grass. He wished he could just walk into the woods and destroy the monster for both Hannibal and Mischa right then and there. To forget the gate, forget crossing anyone over safely, he wanted to decimate it, to take whatever darkness two children had accidentally invited to them and tear it apart with his bare hands. Thinking about the act made his skin tingle pleasantly.

"When you spoke with Dr. Lecter, did he seem ill? As if the spirits had a similar effect on him as it has on you? One would think living in a place like that for so long you'd get tired of it, but from what you described, this Dr. Lecter doesn't seem to be bothered. I'm surprised *you're* bothered if anything, because your talents proceed you. I've enjoyed hearing about your work around the surrounding villages, even if you weren't a good fit for our specific career position." Jack said, not unkindly.

Will blinked at him, folding his arms and leaning back at his chair when faced with the praise, not sure what to do with it. He'd never been good at accepting any flavor of compliment, especially from a higher-up.

"Thanks, it's... I appreciate it. 's fine." He managed gruffly. "I thought maybe it was the prolonged contact, maybe he'd been sick previously but developed an immunity." An immunity to dark magic seemed exceedingly dangerous in this case, because Lecter had definitely.... Adapted to his situation, and Will was not eager to follow.

"An immunity to dark magic?" That got Jack's attention. "Human beings didn't just develop tolerances for energy like that."

"They might. He's a warlock." Will said, but he knew it was a weak excuse.

"If that is the case and this Dr. Lecter has somehow developed this *tolerance*. We need to keep eyes on him. Do you know how incredibly fragile and volatile that type of person-- that personality would be?" Will had already been on the property, investigated thoroughly, and gained the trust of the property owner. What had to be done was obvious, and Jack's confidence was rising.

Will just looked at him, gripping the sides of his chair.

"He knows you and already let you on the property. If he trusts you there is no reason not try to get closer and establish what kind of connection the dark energies harbor and if the doctor could possibly be what people suspect." He had clearly already made up his mind and was writing down in his file that Will Graham would be keeping a close watch on this case.

"With any luck, we may be able to find some possible connections to those family murders as well. Company keeps company and all that."

"What?" Will said, finally breaking from his incredulous stupor, hs hands fanning out to his sides. *'I shouldn't be there for long periods of time if whatever-it-is makes me piss all over myself in my dreams'*, he thought, wrestling to get the words out of his mouth. He considered the dream and the parts that had been somehow taken from him, but his mind betrayed him, tempting him with the few things in such nightmares that were alluring. How it felt to get what was taken gifted back to him in a tightly-wrapped package, how it felt to be so tightly wrapped in a toxic embrace, sweet cinnamon and cloves filling his throat and nostrils, making him choke on decadence.

"This can't... Be good for me, Jack." He managed simply, itself sounding idiotic in the cramped office with the overfilled shelves. He knew that it was settled and completely unreasonable to ignore everything just to hide away within his pack and throw sticks into the stream for months on end. That wasn't what he *did,* that wasn't how he contributed something fucking useful to society.

"What we do isn't good for *us,* not by any means. But the fact of the matter is, it keeps people safe. We save lives, Will. Is that a sacrifice you're willing to make or not?"

Will nodded, his expression vacant. He didn't really need to hear the words said, because he had made his decision coming in to the office, but having absolutely no help, no guidance other than a pat on the back was just peachy. "Sure. You're right. Thanks." He said shortly, and gave a half-salute with his hand before he stood from the chair and made his way out of the tiny office and into the square.

He stared at the fountain a little while, wondering what was waiting for him in the woods. He let the thought of the Doctor - Hannibal - comfort him. He may be infested with some sort of horrible magical virus, but at this point there was nothing either of them could do about it, it just *was*. The least he could do now was make what little he could out of it.

So up the hill went Will Graham, once again.

In Which Mischa Finds Peace

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has some tea. Will likes your cologne. Mischa finds her brother.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A newspaper is seen by the side of the road, discarded. It's wet and a bit crumpled, the front page missing. It reads:

Castle Murasaki-Lecter will be undergoing refurnishing and construction to return the castle to its original glory. The homeowner, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a reclusive and mysterious Bachelor of class reportedly seeks to develop a better reputation for the home among superstitious citizens. More on page 8.

A song echoed across the stone of the castle hallways, gentle and flowing. Hannibal was at work at his harpsichord, eyes closed as he experimented in keys and chord progressions. There had been a melody trapped in his head since Will had disposed of the Lady Murasaki for him, a soft tune that echoed his good mood and radiated light and warmth through the castle.

Hannibal was quite content as he composed, but his gaze left the keyboard as he felt familiar footfalls in his woods that were sluggish from fatigue, which was to be expected if Will hadn't been sleeping.

Without doing more than standing, Hannibal disappeared and reappeared in the foyer to let Will in shortly after he had knocked, though he had not yet. For a moment the Count stood still on the other side of the front door, resting his hand on the wood as his eyes fell shut and he inhaled deeply through his nose.

He was all forests and mud, with an added acrid smell of stomach bile washed away with the cool water that had run off the north mountains. What he would give to see Will wading into that stream, shuddering at the cold of melted snow. He wanted to see him smiling with his pack around him, yipping and playing there as he had seen in some of Will's memories.

Hannibal exhaled and pulled open the door, his face a content mask, "Hello again, Will. Come for your clothing?"

"Hello, Hannibal." Will greeted with one of his halting, unsure smiles, his fist in the air poised to knock. He chuckled softly before putting it down.

"Yeah, I came to get my clothes. That's not the only reason why I came, obviously, but..." He let his word trail, soft crows feet crawling the corners of his eyes.

"Please come in." Hannibal said as he stepped out of Will's way. "Whatever the occasion in which I find you at my doorstep, you are always welcome. Would you like to join me in the music room for tea?"

"Tea sounds nice, thanks." Will said with a nod of his head as they fell in step with each other, venturing once again into the well-decorated hallways of the manor.

Hannibal paused in his steps a moment before continuing, polite concern affecting his expression. "You look positively ashen, Will. Have you been feeling ill?"

"Do I really look that bad?" Will answered with a sigh. Both Hannibal and Jack had noticed, and it was a tad bit embarrassing. "Yes, I've been vomiting my stomach lining competitively for the last few days. I can only handle gentle foods, and my family isn't really known for their refined sense of taste... I had meant to ask you about it."

Leading him into the music room, Hannibal gestured to the two leather chairs that sat facing each other. "Ask me about your illness? In a clinical sense?" Hannibal cocked a brow curiously in Will's direction as poured black tea into a pretty white china cup with lavenders painted delicately onto the handle. He moved gracefully back to Will to hand him the cup and saucer before sitting across from him to sip at his own tea, savoring the electric, self-mixed pairing that made the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

(His teabag was of course recycled from the handkerchief he'd used the day before to absorb the blood from the investigator's wounds, and it had recycled quite well.)

"It's more personal than clinical, I think." Will admitted, wondering if breaking the news to Hannibal would seem uncouth, or unprofessional. How much tact could he use to tell the Count that he was suspicious that being near him may be poisonous? He held the teacup gingerly in his hands, staring into it as if it would tell him his future at the bottom of the herbal mix.

"I am afraid... I've made steps towards the conclusion that I may be averse to dark magic." He picked carefully, his eyebrows dancing over his expressions as he attempted to speak gently.

"I've started having dreams that accompany the severity of my illness. I'm not sure what they mean, but they don't feel like fever dreams and they are nowhere close to dreams I normally have."

Crossing his legs and resting his hands to knit together over his knee, Hannibal nodded as he kept his gaze locked on Will studiously. He had created Will's dreams, felt the desperate ache inside of him for what had been "taken" from him and heard pleading in the back of his mind... A pleading that tickled the predator inside him and made him want to push further between the cracks of that fort Will had spent so long building. Sleep made him vulnerable and the privilege of painting inside a mind weakened by slumber was an art he took pride in with each brushstroke, but past the time he spent in dreams he couldn't do too much. It was a pity.

"The nature of dark magic is meant to tempt a user into committing to it and utilizing it for their own gain. With your talents being exposed to such a busy property as this, it would be fair to assume that perhaps your body held onto lingering negativity after your extended visits two days in a row. It is not uncommon for people like yourself to hold onto the lives they absorb. You said yourself, some things follow you home."

"Are you implying... They followed me because I have some sort of affinity for it?" Will said tersely, his hands balling the loose fabric of his pants between each digit, wrinkling it. "That doesn't make sense. I've never been anywhere close to competent when it comes to using magic, so why would I attract that phenomenal power? I'm not special in any way."

He picked his teacup back up again tightly as if it would float away if he let it go.

Hannibal cocked an eyebrow, but let the remark skip, obviously displeased. "I will say my part about that later, but what about your dreams? Tell me about those."

Will swallowed a burning mouthful and winced at the pain. "Ah... They're... It's hard to explain. Something inside of never-ending darkness views me as it's light, and it's trying desperately to snuff me out." He thought of slippery wet lips sliding against his own, sending his nerve endings alight, leaving him desperate to return to it's embrace with cinnamon-spice promises and an addictive touch. In his illness he'd only had one night of dreams, and he shamefully wished to be rewarded for his trials again with yet another toxic embrace, to be held and comforted by something so dark.

"You were born to be a bridge, Will." Hannibal said gently, looking down to the man's chest where he knew the small scar laid under the thin fabric of his shirt. It pulsed with power just under his skin, surging green and blue and white.

He let his tongue brush over his lower lip, his eyes slipping slowly down Will's frame before flicking back up to meet clear blue.

"To learn magic is a privilege, but the man before me now was *created* to be a breach in the veil between plains. As a result, your beacon of light in the darkness will naturally attract attention."

His words dripped slowly from his mouth like blood that leaked from a wound not fully healed. "There are many elements about you that one could find attractive and that is simply a fact, when you cast aside modesty - which is unnecessary when you are with me, Will."

Will leaned down to adjust his boot, once again feeling his stomach twist inside of him as if his tea would come right back up into Hannibal's pristine parlor. The doctor had said all this while remaining brazen and quite forward, but then seemed to come to his own senses, looking away with his jaw clenched. It was incredibly flattering and it made Will blush, the both of them existing in that moment as inexperienced teenagers trying to flirt over dark magic and illness and special talents that had never been asked for.

"Don't accuse me of being modest when you know the life I lead." Will said, turning his pleased and flustered response immediately onto something defensive. "I live largely as a wild animal, I own two pairs of clothes and my diet consists largely of red meat - I'm not exactly a high-rated and sought after bachelor of London, Hannibal. Modesty is unnecessary."

He tried to say something in return about how Hannibal had an actual something to be modest about, being a devilishly handsome and egregiously powerful count of high regard and status who had everything to offer and more, but he instead just scowled.

"As far as dark magic goes, you're right. I'm a gate, and that's what attracts most things that come into my life. It has nothing to do with my thought processes or wants or needs, it's just... What I was born to do."

Will could see slight indicators of irritation stirring around Hannibal's features in downcast eyes and a flare of his nostrils, visibly getting impatient.

"If modesty is unnecessary as we have both clearly stated, why then insist that you have nothing to offer besides the gift you supposedly did not earn? Because that *is* what you're doing. By plainly stating that there's something negative about your lifestyle you assumedly see faults in things simply based on the fact that they are yours and have to do with you. You are not the gate itself, Will. You're much more than that, and you don't need to prove it to me."

"The best thing I have to offer is something only accessible to the dead!" Will said, his voice raised just a few decibels in his frustration. "Look, Hannibal, this conversation is useless. I appreciate your opinion and your," He made a wildly nonspecific gesture towards the man, "I appreciate it, but I didn't... Come here to be psychoanalyzed and flattered, I came here to figure out why I'm puking my guts out, to get my clothes, and to help you with the beast in the woods. Would it be terribly inconvenient to please move on from this?"

The frustration in Hannibal's body language was obvious, as was the strained tension between them, and Will had no clue how to breach the odd connection that pulled and strained at the ropes tying it down.

Hannibal nodded once, deciding it better to say nothing and probe no further. Will was not open to showing any more of himself just yet, so Hannibal would have to pull back his own

curtains instead. It was necessary to build trust as it became clear that Will had trouble trusting in the first place.

"There is no beast in the woods, there is just Mischa and her suffering and her memories." It was stated clinically in his desperate need to distance himself from the emotional connection he had. Mischa was the only thing he needed gone, and then he could finally move past it for both of their sake.

Hannibal focused back on Will who now freely roamed around the music room, curiously looking at anything that could distract him from the doctor.

He looked up the ladder to the various shelves lining the loft, nodding aggressively. "Right, right, Mischa and her memories." He turned back to Hannibal gingerly after a moment on his heel. The man looked pensive, and he was again reminded how close this was to Hannibal's heart.

"Are you sure that it's just in a memory loop? You're absolutely positive? Because there have been a string of murders in town, gruesome ones. I was briefed on them in town by the man who runs the more… Niche case investigations, Jack Crawford. He suspected that it might be something inhuman, so I need to be completely sure Mischa and the beast aren't anything to suspect."

Hannibal shook his head firmly. "I am surely positive there is no beast in my forests, Will. If there were I would know immediately."

He stood from his chair and crossed back over to the Harpsichord, moving about the space freely and comfortably. "I have to admit what you say is intriguing, however. An inhuman string of murders?"

"Someone has been ruthlessly killing entire families in their homes, leaving their corpses filled with mirror shards, only on the nights of the full moon." Will answers Hannibal, feeling the man's eyes still on him. "He chooses them randomly. It seems like the only criteria is that they're happy and well-functioning."

It was a disturbing concept. To feel threatened simply because you were surrounded by love had to be the most maddeningly confusing predicament, he thought.

"I glimpsed something to that effect in the papers in the last week or so, yes. But what about it implies something inhuman?" Hannibal asked, pleasantly mystified.

To him it was perfectly human to destroy other humans in bizarre and horrific ways. For the short period of time that Hannibal himself had been human he had taken part in the destruction and recreation of human life into pieces of art, elevating useless existences into a higher plane of function - for what was life for but to partake in creation, he reasoned?

"The damage isn't clean enough to be considered human. There are giant claw marks, huge gashes in the furniture, giant footprints in the lawn… But they're made clumsily, not as part of a statement. They were left on purpose but it's not because they were planned by a skilled craftsman." Will said, putting his hands on his hips. "All the mirrors are ruined in the house,

and there are giant pools of burned and charred remains, but only in specific areas. It's reckless. He's powerful, but not as powerful as he wants to be. He's prone to random bouts of destruction and chaos in these homes and it seems to me he does many things simply to prove to himself how strong he is."

He turned back to Hannibal with a sigh. "I think it might be a Dragonborn who thinks of himself as something more impressive, possibly a full sized dragon. I thought perhaps it might be the beast in the woods because Mischa is terrified of it, but it's never been described to me. I was hoping my investigations were incorrect and that perhaps it wasn't an identity crisis at all, but truly a brainless monster. Wishful thinking, in a way... It'd be so much easier to manage if that were the case."

Hannibal made a sound of understanding. "Of course. It is easier to distance oneself from atrocities that way. For you it would be more simple to dispose of a demon than find a lost soul addicted to destruction." He allowed himself to think along with the investigator as he watched Will's thoughts tempest about within his skull.

"The smashing and placing of mirrors is interesting.. Do you think he pictures himself as disfigured?"

"Possibly." Will replied, drawing a finger through the tiny layer of dust that sat gently on top of the shelf he stood next to. "If he sees himself as something large and great, he could be showing off his power in slaughter. People who die by his hands would be killed by someone greater than them, possibly greater than even him. In order to see something reflected in their final moments."

Will thought back to when he had first investigated a family killed in such a way, the spirit of a young mother describing her death dramatically, flowering words describing a gargantuan beast with huge sharp teeth and dangerous claws. "That's what they thought they were dying to, woken up in the middle of the night, surrounded by the bleary dark and hopeless night. Not that he'd know that, but I'm sure he'd be pleased to hear of it."

Hannibal thought fondly of a little dragonborn boy wishing he was just like his ancestors and felt a fascinated shiver creep along his spine. He wished he could witness such a becoming and that he could speak with the violently departed to gain their insight.

"An interesting man, indeed. Finding himself comforted within a monster."

"Interesting is one way to put it." Will said with a grimace. "Interesting that a dozen people are dead because of some Dragonborn with a complex."

He mused that Hannibal probably saw himself in such a terror. Developing into one's ideal self was something he had done, after all. Will couldn't see it as something to be proud of - happy families were not stepping stones slaughtered to feed an ego. Lives had value, but the value wasn't to be used and discarded, they were made for longevity, to create opportunity and fill in the blanks of other lives. They were stepping stones for progress, not a single rock placed in the middle of a path for someone to wander around.

He realised he'd been thinking this instead of saying it, wishing he could articulate what life meant, what justice could serve, but instead he simply turned around to look at Hannibal, wondering what exactly he was thinking.

The doctor looked a little disappointed, his normally perfect posture just barely wilted. "I must apologize Will. I have seen much death in my life, too much for any one being to account for. Sometimes my reactions can be more clinical than sensitive."

Will ran a gentle comb over the surface of his mind and saw... Pride. It took him aback.

"Uh... Speaking of which, I do want to eventually get into the forest today, unless there were any other things in particular you needed me for." He said, instead of continuing to think about the odd rays of concealed joy tucked within the corners of Hannibal's mind.

Hannibal's eyes darted up instantly when he felt Will probe, an earthy green brushing gently into a corner of his mind. As the reach of the tender vines withdrew, far too briefly for his liking, Hannibal felt an aching tug of want for it to return.

When Will pulled away he also noticed that bits of Hannibal came with his mind, dangling from him like cobwebs could cling to bare skin, wrapping around him loosely. He was tempted to shake him off, knowing that if he could read Hannibal that he could be read as well, but he had nothing to hide, truly. He let the cobwebs be, sitting peacefully among the outskirts of his mind.

Hannibal emptied his tea cup and returned it to it's saucer, nodding at Will, "Yes, we can go there now, I don't want to keep you too long." He smiled at Will, but it was dull. The house breathed and creaked with an ache that Hannibal couldn't hide from, because he knew soon he would be mourning the permanent loss of his Mischa.

"I just want to finish this as soon as I can. If it makes me sick, I'd rather not prolong the contact, but I don't want to go back on my word." Will said, his stomach twisting as he remembered his dreams, not eager to revisit them.

Today was colder than the last few weeks, and it was windier than normal. The sparse trees lining the pathway to the front doors shook as they walked past them and made their journey into where the thickets of forest began.

Hannibal paused with Will at the edge of the trees. "Will.. You'll put her to peace, yes?" He asked. There was something in his voice that made a heavy lump build in Will's own throat. A second hand emotion that Hannibal himself couldn't express anymore, his own pain numb to him at this point.

"Of course, yes." Will said, Hannibal's emotions and body language pulling him in, a strong magnet to his own emotions. He was a beacon for the dead, but Hannibal was a beacon for his own, it seemed. He was a sponge, truly listening to everything Will experienced and felt, genuinely interested in what he had to say and share. There weren't many people that the investigator would allow to lead him into the deep woods, make him desperately ill. Hannibal may have darkness in him, but in spite of it all he was kind. He was worth trusting. In just a

few shared experiences he'd become invaluable to Will - and he hoped to know more, experience more.

Hannibal's head tilted upward to watch the falling leaves that cascaded around the man next to him, and saw the visage of Lucifer in the light of the Grace that betrayed him. He had found his God, and that was dangerous. Will stood before him as a symbol of divinity rapidly approaching his fall, though he knew not how, not yet.

"She knows me in my wild shape, so would you hold my satchel and my clothes for me...? " Will asked thickly as they traversed into the woods, looking back at Hannibal every few steps.

Crimson eyes that had been unmasked permanently in Will's presence sparkled. "Of course, Will." He said as he gently took Will's bag from him and watched, keen as Will began to shift.

Will felt just as exposed changing the second time in front of Hannibal as he did the first, his body warping easily as he flipped the switch in his brain that he had created so painstakingly as a young boy. After a few long seconds he stood in front of Hannibal and looked up at him, his tail wagging in spite of itself, now inwardly and outwardly pleased. He could do this once per day, one shift in and one out, and usually not more unless he'd been particularly relaxed. It was a limit to the magical energy druids possessed, but it had never proved to him to be a problem worth worrying about.

"Thank you." He communicated easily, picking up his clothes in order to place them in Hannibal's arms before turning and tromping through the brush. They continued a little while until the weight in the woods sat very heavy on them and Will began to approach the tree he had reached before.

"Mischa?" He barked, looking up and around for the little spirit. "I've brought someone to see you."

Mischa's voice rang through Hannibal's very core and it shook him, vibrating through his entire being as he was overwhelmed, clasping a hand over his mouth to stifle a horrible emotional response.

"Ha...Hannibal?" Mischa recognized her elder brother, but he somehow looked nothing like she remembered. His white-blond hair had deepened to a grey sandy brown in its maturity, and he was tall and broad. Her brother was a man now. How long had he been a like this? She quivered as she realized slowly that her brother had lived to grow and mature. Part of her felt the familiar instinct to flee from him. It *was* Hannibal, but this man was far from the young boy that once begged her to run away.

This man before her now resembled the beast that took her in its unnatural flames. She began to cry, centuries of mourning flooding her emotions all at once. It was horrible to find justification for her fears in this way.

Will's heart sank. Something had gone terribly wrong. The cobwebs that had clung to his mind shook and started to weigh themselves down as Hannibal felt like he wanted to sink

into the foliage of the forest floor.

He didn't understand, Will thought in bewilderment. What was going on? She was crying again in the way that only kids really do, uncaring to the sound or the volume of what noises they made.

Hannibal made a noise too, and it made Will instinctually pad over to his side to press into him with his weight, trying to show reassurrance in any way he could.

"Why do you continue to cry?" He asked Mischa softly, but his eyes stayed with Hannibal.

"He died that night... He died... The fire hurt him like it hurt me.." Mischa wept.

Hannibal felt the prickling of tears behind his eyes, a sensation he had completely forgotten. Will watched as blood brimmed along Hannibal's dense lower lashes for a moment before his thumb moved up instinctually to brush it away, staining the pad of his thumb.

"Mischa..." His voice was a whisper, fragile as tempered glass.

"H-Hanni... " She said and shifted closer to her dog friend, keeping him between her and the tall man that was once her brother.

Hannibal kneeled to the forest floor, making himself smaller to match a child's height. "You found me." He managed, wiping away another copper tear.

Will was moved away from Hannibal, Mischa's tiny spirit pulling at him like her little fingers had wound through his thick fur. Both of the sibling's sounds infected his blood and chilled his skin, each of them devastated for different reasons.

"Hannibal was asked to make a... A hard choice, that night." He said softly, between both siblings. His emotions were rippling in tune with the both of them uncomfortably and he wasn't sure who to comfort. He wanted to bury himself in Hannibal's arms to offer him something forgiving, but his thoughts warred against it - he knew what the boy had chosen was of his own accord, or at least that was what he had been told. But this little one, so much like his own Harley, his own Abby, was so small.

"Children know nothing of the world, so why should they be punished by it?" He said to Hannibal, knowing his words were coarse and not fun to hear, but the Count needed to hear them. He needed to let her go, for both of their sake.

There was a shift within Hannibal as Will's words echoed in his head and his jaw clenched tight, eyes quickly beginning to overflow with his thick tears, leaving dark streaks down his handsome cheekbones. Unable to speak, he nodded in agreement. Mischa had been punished for what he had done for long enough and he had been well aware of it but had endured it to punish himself in a twisted, selfish way.

"Hannibal no... Don't cry..." Mischa glowed a little warmer, moving to him through the space around her tree.

"I found you, we are both safe now."

Hannibal bit hard into his lower lip as it quivered and his thin brows knit together, reaching up to dab at the blood on his cheeks and eyes with his bare knuckles. He looked at Will desperately, completely at a loss for words.

Will had never expected to see Hannibal so exposed. He was truly open here, showing true and honest vulnerability. His pride had been shattered, faced with something he'd done and regretted long ago but attempted to forget. It was obvious that he had concealed such feelings deep below, and pulling them out was painful. There was something alluring in this Hannibal, his feelings on the surface like an open wound.

He tried to ignore what must have been the strong smell of his cologne, stronger now in this form, breathing against the distractingly pleasant scent.

"You found him, and he found you. Are you happy?" Will said after he pried his eyes from Hannibal's, looking up at the little blue spirit.

"I'm happy..." Mischa warbled sadly. It was a melancholy victory, he thought, and he sat on his hind paws to draw her in, his chest tingling and his ribcage feeling hot as it pulsed with energy, sensing her willingness to part. She flew closer to him and as he began to connect to Will her image began to take a cloudy shape.

She had Hannibal's cheekbones, and sweet eyes framed by thick blonde eyelashes. She wrapped her arms around Will with tiny sobs, and they were the same size.

Will moved a bit, pushing her ghost into Hannibal's grasp at last. They both held her, surrounded by the scent of the forest and the unidentifiable aroma of Hannibal's sweat, and Mischa and Will both looked to Hannibal, weeping together, a tiny family in the forest.

Will would have felt like he was intruding if it weren't for the connection he felt to the both of them. They were one, they knew each other and saw the other's innermost thoughts and fears. It felt like they were inside of one another's souls, connected irreparably.

"I love you brother." Mischa whispered, embraced on both sides. Will began to feel her join him gently, like a thin cloud disappearing into a fog in the horizon.

Hannibal wrapped his arms around both the rapidly disappearing Mischa and Will's fuzzy frame, breaths labored with emotion as his little sister said her last goodbye. "I love you, sister."

For the first time in many centuries, there was suddenly an overwhelming absence of something on the grounds, the part of it used to echoing with loneliness and fear finally quiet. Hannibal tried to reach the tendrils of his mind out to reach his little spirit and found only the quiet breeze that swirled around them and shook the leaves, whistling without emotion.

He was only holding onto Will now as fresh scarlet tears streaked down his cheeks and into the soft curls of Will's fur. He gently cradled the druid's head against the velvet of his jacket and listened carefully to the white noise of the forest as he attempted to get used to the nothing that was happening inside of the trees, and his shaking steadied after a moment that could have stretched on for days.

"Will.." His voice felt raw, like that was new to him as well.

"I'm here." Will said softly, surrounded by the newness of the situation as just he and Hannibal were surrounded by the forest, both of them grieving and breathing against each other shakily, minds reeling in tandem.

It took a monumental effort to extract himself from Hannibal's arms, but Will took his satchel gently in his mouth for just a moment, padding into the quiet of the woods.

Hannibal thought for a moment he had left to abandon him in his grief, for just a split second, but he needn't worry - Will came back almost immediately after leaving, looking fully human and with a pair of pants over his hips.

"I didn't want to be..." Will said, but Hannibal knew what he meant.

To his own surprise, Will felt his aversion to this sort of touch evaporating as he, now only barely smaller than Hannibal, fit back into his arms, wrapping his own securely around the man.

The forest was cool, and so was Hannibal. Will had drips of dried red spattered on his back from where it had landed on his fur, and it continued to drip down his bare skin, dipping into the curve of his spine. It was a relief to have absorbed a soul into him that was so small and unharmed. Mischa settled into his muscles gently, so different from the abrasiveness that had been Lady Murasaki.

Hannibal still smelled divine, and Will tried not to make it entirely too obvious when he allowed himself to inhale through his nose and sigh back into the velvet of the doctor's clothing.

"You did it." He said, voice muffled into the man's chest, but he didn't let go. "She's free. So are you."

"No, Will. *You* did it, and my only contribution was selfish in nature." Hannibal gently tilted Will's head up with his left hand away from his chest, looking at him with a stony expression, withholding emotion as best he could once again. " *You* saved her, Will."

The same hand slipped gently to the back of Will's neck, long fingers tangling into the curls there as a long and delicate thumb softly brushed along his jaw before resting right under Will's ear. Hannibal could feel his heart swell in his chest, hypersensitive to the organ he possessed no need for, but Will had been making him more and more aware of it every second they had spent in each other's presence. It was no longer used for pumping blood through his system, but his chest still ached with emotions.

His voice dropped lower as the forest around them sighed in relief and warmth as black shadows only he could see gripped and bound them closer together. "You saved both of us."

The words bubbled from Will's chest as if he were boiling over. "I have never met anyone like you, Hannibal." He said, the confession hanging, suspended in the air between them. It meant more than Will could ever expand upon.

Slowly, the druid leaned forward - hoping against hope it wasn't terribly inappropriate to do so, his stomach fluttering, and placed his lips upon Hannibal's glistening cheek.

He regretted it immediately as clouds of darkness came to obscure his vision, the hunger that had been licking pleasantly within his belly stirring up in him full force, the smell doubling in intensity and knocking him backwards.

"What..." He snarled softly, picking himself out of the foliage of the forest, his lips smeared with red and his nostrils flared.

Blood. The smell was blood.

In Which Will Takes A Tasty Drink

Chapter Summary

This one's a little spicy! But if you didn't think there'd be a lot of blood in this fic

??????

You mystify me.

Anyway, Will does a big sipp. Hannibal watches him subsequently fall apart. Jack drinks something too, but it's just alcohol. Spoiler alert. Oops.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I need to get out of this forest, I have to-"

Quickly, Hannibal grabbed him again, insistent in his iron grip as he held Will's head between his hands firmly.

"Do you trust me, Will?" He asked as his hand brushed against the side of the other man's exposed ribcage, dragging across his skin with the smooth pads of his fingers and nails. Will felt as if he'd been stabbed, the desperate feeling of missing something coming back to cloud his senses once again.

Will's mind was reeling and he could barely hold on to any coherent thoughts as Hannibal effortlessly held on to his body with such strength that he felt captured and caged like a wild animal, but safe in the unbreakable embrace. He inhaled and held his breath after a soft, struggling sound.

"Hannibal I-- I..." He tried to reach for anything coherent, but only succeeded in tasting the blood on his mouth again, shutting his eyes against the whirlwind of sensations that started striking him again like blows from yet another fist.

He could only nod after that, for he had no other options left. Yes, he trusted in Hannibal. He had to, because he couldn't trust the ground he stood on. What was happening to him?

"Good, then there is no need to keep you waiting any longer, lest you risk illness again. You'll be able to have as much as you want soon enough, far more than what I can steep into your tea." Hannibal said clinically as he removed his jacket and folded it gingerly, placing it on top of Will's satchel before removing his right cufflink and rolling up his sleeve.

The doctor lifted his own fist to his mouth and Will watched, enraptured as pink lips curled over rapidly sharpening teeth that then sank directly into his wrist before withdrawing after a brief moment. He licked his chin and held a welcoming arm out to Will to join him again, beckoning along with the decadent smell drifting into Will's nostrils that was more pungent than ever before, wrapping his body in cinnamon and cloves.

"Come to me, I'll give you what you need. From the source it is much better than anything I could cook to accompany it."

The scent of blood completely took over all of Will's senses, more than just smell and taste - the ache was rearing its ugly head yet again, and his sight continued to warp like heat waves off of desert sand. Everything in him needed to oblige. This was an addiction that he didn't realise he had, only seeing the evidence now after experiencing it's heavy withdrawal. He was sweating from the effort it took to stay away, his body trying to turn, run, and leave the forest. What was it that risked such illness? Allowing himself to taste, or keeping himself away?

"I don't understand. Did you cook your own blood into…" He said through his teeth, eyes locked on Hannibal's wrist as his body was leaning, tilting towards the beautiful red poison in spite of itself. A wild, untamed beast within him roared to let Hannibal do this, to let him give him an excuse. His subconscious craved a reason to do it, to justify allowing himself this, but it ran undeciphered through him in its simplicity. We can pretend you are helpless, it said, if that makes it easier.

"It was for your own good, I promise you. You needed it." Hannibal reassured as he gripped the back of Will's head, tilting him backwards as the wound hovered over his face, dripping onto his lips and coaxing them to part and twitch as he pressed into him firmly.

"Uuh-" Will's vocal chords betrayed him upon the first real taste of the thick red wine pouring from the bow of his upper lip. He swallowed immediately, and his tongue broke past the barrier of his teeth to settle across more of Hannibal's skin, the wound emanating something that felt like comfort and serenity that felt right as he mouthed the area hotly, the movement clumsy and slightly desperate.

There was a soft hiss from Hannibal as Will's tongue lavishly passed over his gift in soft but greedy motions. The heat of it sent tingling ripples of pleasure to his fingertips and he suppressed a shiver as he leaned forward and brushed his nose against Will's hairline, murmuring.

"I want to show you everything, Will. I want you to see me clearly, like you have so eagerly shown me. I want you to know my secrets, for I know you can keep them just as well."

Hannibal's voice was honey and molasses, soothing his tense nerves and muscles starting at the apex of his shoulders, and Will relaxed into him with a wavering sigh. Hannibal was stroking his hair softly now, slow circles that mixed with the lovely heat from his blood, sending one of the most pleasant feelings Will had experienced in years down his neck, through his spine and around his hips, encouraging him to make another satisfied little groan.

Secrets. Hannibal knew all of his secrets, had seen him in his entirety, and here he was exposing himself to Will, terrifying as he was. He wondered blearily what else the man could

do, what he could show him, and what Will could learn from him.

His lips made a lewd sound as he sucked, not getting enough from the only shallow wound. Hannibal had told him he'd risk illness if he took too much, but that had been nothing, the illness couldn't hold a candle to how he knew he could feel, now that he'd been shown.

It was absolute torture for Hannibal. Will was holding his wrist to his mouth now with both hands, forgetting himself as thoughts of the other took over all of his senses in a powerful grasp. He was beautiful like this, utterly divine in his acceptance.

"That's... Enough, Will." His voice felt thick, and he swallowed hard as he firmly tugged back on Will's hair to pry his mouth away from his wrist, the man's mouth hanging open. It made Hannibal wish he could push his tongue inside of it and take more from him, completely dismantling him where he stood. As it was, he settled himself into being grateful.

"What do you feel, Will?" He asked eagerly.

Experiencing what Hannibal was, truly was, came to Will like an echo - he had seen this, once, through a lense of the horrible, painful looking glass that was his transformed body. Now was completely unlike anything he could have expected to come from that, to develop from the worst existence to the best one in seconds.

"I feel... Everything." He said, looking through the forest through new eyes, touching Hannibal with new fingers over his sturdy chest that moved up and down with unbitten breath, no heartbeat to speak of.

The castle wasn't alive, not in the sense of anything Will could have come up with - the castle was Hannibal. They existed alongside each other because they were one.

Will felt sacred. He felt like he could conquer the world, but was he in a line of many to receive an opportunity like this? He ached to push himself forward and close the gap between their mouths, eager to taste something else, something so decadent as Hannibal Lecter - his savior, his world... But something in him held him back.

Something inside him shouted a warning. These weren't Will's true thoughts, this was the poison of his blood, and Will should not think himself so special, for this man of so many talents and interests and dark, horrible magics, to actually feel for him. Will was being used for his body, and here he was willingly parting with it.

Instead of pressing their lips together in the fire of passion and hunger, knowing full well he would not pull away, Will leaned gently into the man's grasp with a sigh, allowing himself to be held, sated. He still ached to hold, to kiss and mark, but in a grand effort he simply looked, a slight, creeping light shining through his eyes as they briefly shone cobalt.

Hannibal's lips parted over his teeth again, but now in a devilish grin. "You truly are the most magnificent creature I have laid my eyes upon, Will Graham." He murmured as their foreheads met. "If you aren't careful, I'll be tempted to keep you." The tease brushed Will's eyelids as Hannibal pressed a soft kiss to each of them before regretfully withdrawing.

"I'm so grateful for what you did for Mischa today, and for me by extension. You must be exhausted, so it's best for you to get home and rest with your family."

He couldn't overwhelm him all at once, he reasoned - he needed to be gentle. Hannibal wanted to show him everything, and that would take time and patience.

(Perhaps not as much time as he originally had assumed, which was very pleasing.)

"You'll come again, won't you." It sounded almost like a question, if one convinced themselves it was.

Moonbeams began to break through the canopy of the calm forest above the two of them and caught their intertwined hands for a short moment before Hannibal hesitantly withdrew backwards, letting Will's hand go.

"Goodnight."

His smile was the last thing Will could see in the total darkness separating harshly from the light of the moon before his shape changed and molded itself apart, pulling into slick black strings that then formed a murder of black crows crying out into the blackness of the fresh night.

Of course, Will wanted to say, watching the crows fly haphazardly into the sky, above the trees, untraceable within seconds. He bent to pick up his satchel before starting to trot into the thicket of forest. Absolutely. Yes, there is nothing I'd rather do than be here with you.

"I'll try." Is what he ended up saying, even though he knew Hannibal couldn't hear him anymore, his feet snapping branches along the ground, thick calluses protecting the skin on his toes as he gradually started into a run. He didn't want to face the sun on his own, he needed the cover of the woods. He didn't want anyone to see him with blood staining his collarbone and his mind, thoughts whirling within him like a cyclone. He ran until he reached a layer of crumbling cobblestoned fencing, clambering over it and continuing down the hill.

Hannibal realised for the first time in a long time that he had been wrong, mulling the fact over as he followed the man that sprinted from his property. Previously, he had described Will's spiritual talents, taking souls into his body to allow them to cross into their paradise, as the most beautiful thing he had seen.

But as his wings carried him high above the trees, following the bright blue beacon of a man drawn to perceived madness, he realised that Will's energy and not his talent was what he knew to be the most beautiful thing in his world. It was sheer chaotic power, untamed and feral and it made Hannibal giddy with pride. Will could only reach his true potential now that Hannibal allowed him to taste exactly what he could be capable of.

He should have run out of energy now, he should have been whining from horrid, gripping cramps in his ribcage and legs as his breathing became ragged - but each inhale came effortlessly, and he barely broke a sweat. It was wonderous, and he hated it because everything in him told him to hate it. This wasn't him. He wasn't a machine that ran on the

high of power, he was peaceful, he lived as far away from humanity as he could to avoid as much conflict as possible, he didn't even hunt with his pack half of the time.

He kept running because it was all he felt he could do, and it took a long time to realise he also felt completely furious. He hadn't asked for this - he'd done nothing but give kindness to Hannibal, show him his gifts, expose his soul and body and mind to the man with no expectations of anything in return because he felt like Hannibal would accept him, and accepted he had been. But he never imagined that what Hannibal would show him... Could be something like this, something that transformed him into something dark and sinister and horrifying. That it would be something given to him with no choice between that and an alternative.

You did have a choice. Something in him said sweetly. You could have run whenever you wanted to.

His senses flared as he reached a small clearing, seeing a rabbit at the edge of it, it's ears straight up, nose twitching. Will hated it, suddenly. He picked up a rock and threw it, point blank at the rabbit as hard as he possibly could, and the sharp edge struck it's head with a dull thud. It fell over immediately, dropping to the ground and he ran to it in a mess of sticks and foliage, his mind tearing into himself, his senses heightened and making him feel so new, and he took the little creature by the head in one hand, sticking his nose into it's neck where it was struck, and inhaled.

Blood. Barely an echo of Hannibal's, but it was blood.

He tore the skin of the little animal off with his teeth, messily spitting the chunks onto the ground, red staining his teeth as he furiously tore into it, his vision hot and lined with crimson, and he was swallowing mouthfuls of it, and it barely tasted like anything but the texture was there and the feeling was there, and the satisfaction of destruction, of tearing something apart with his own power was addicting - he was in complete control of this tiny insignificant thing and he had ended it's life on a whim.

The rabbit's white fur was pink when he tore himself away, breathing heavily, anger ebbing away as it turned to horror and shame.

What... What had he become, in that moment?

He stood up fast, eyelashes flickering slowly as he stared at the innocent thing completely destroyed by what he had indulged himself in. His breaths were short and labored, as if he were shoving poison out of his lungs.

It was a long time before he reached his own clearing, and even then he passed it as quietly as he could in order to sit in the freezing water of the stream, keeping his inner feelings at bay as he emotionlessly washed himself clean of the beast.

At some point, after it had turned dark and beyond, Will dragged himself out of the stream and onto the riverbed. He found himself terrified of sleep, knowing what the last night had brought - he'd vomited so much that his tongue had started to burn with stomach acid, his

head thumping with every heartbeat as he tried to forget the nightmares of things being taken and returned.

His body betrayed him here, and he rubbed his eyes madly, but the day he'd had, with Jack, and Mischa's return, and the blood... it was too much.

This nightmare was arguably worse than anything he'd imagined.

He was in the darkness again, but this time there was someone with him, unseen, pressed against his back and pulsing with energy. The satisfaction that Will had felt along with the blood he drank greedily from Hannibal's wrist was back, and it filled him so much better, so much more completely than before, and every hair stood on it's end as he realised why - the figure pressed up so close behind him was gyrating into him, cool and smooth, and Will's wrist was wet with the kiss of full, soft lips and the grasp of strong jaws.

He had everything now. It had been given back... He had taken it willingly, so this was far better than taking it without knowing, this time. He'd indulged himself far more than a simple cup of tea, and this was his reward.

"You can afford to indulge yourself. You have nothing to lose in doing so." Said the figure, and Will could feel the backside of his body slipping against smooth, formless skin off the another creature, barely identifiable as human.

His captured wrist pulsed with a gentle pleasure, not overwhelming in the slightest, and he used his unbound hand to pick up what was assumedly the figure's arm, wrapping it fully around his throat to surround himself with the scent of its skin. His blunt teeth scraped at what was now a strong and cool bicep, cutting clumsily across nerves, managing to make their way under the skin and release pearls of blood into his mouth.

They drank from each other for what could have been hours, content to sway with the rhythm of their bodies, Will's throat fluttering under the constant pressure of the figure's full arm. The figure that took shape and had long ago, and had somehow failed to scare him away.

"Hannibal..." Will sighed, sated, happy and relaxed, completely letting go of the control he usually desperately needed, that he clung to constantly to feel safe.

"Tell me Will..." said the figure. "What part of this is your nightmare?"

Will woke in his attempt to answer as the gentle sun came over the horizon, feeling better rested than he'd been in years and a low, gentle waves of pleasure climbing down his spine and into his groin.

He laid there for far too long just waiting for the vomit, the headache, and the ringing in his ears to start, but it never came. He felt well rested and relaxed, clean from the river, and a little hungry.

Hunger for actual food, and that was all, he swore to himself.

Breakfast was a casual affair, and he built a small fire to cook the pigskin from prey that one of the wolves had captured. They gave him a bit of a hard time about not being with them much as of late, but he brushed it off on his obligations to his other duties - he'd make it up to them soon, he promised.

Harley had slipped into a mud puddle the day before and was half brown now, her peach-blonde fur stained as she trotted proudly about Will and snuffled away bits of his food.

"Are you done yet with your job?" She asked, and Winston wasn't far behind to join them, looking sleepy and yawning with a tiny little whine in the back of his throat.

"Not yet, Harles." Will said, taking a mouthful of cooked pork, only a little tough. "But I think I have a way to speed it along." He added after he swallowed, picking up a piece for her.

"Okay." Harley said with adoration in her eyes as she was offered a little scrap on his fingers.

Will thought about exactly how he could present this to Jack after he finished, kissing Winston behind the ears and making his way into town, still feeling miraculously healthy. The police station wasn't far, and he offered a peach to Jack casually that he'd snatched from the forest, fingers still a little dirty from his earlier meal.

"There are two monsters, Jack."

Jack smiled when he saw that Will looked considerably healthier than the day before, eyebrows lifting in surprise as he greeted Will politely at the office door, moving with him down the stairs to the Inspector's office and the morgue.

"Two monsters? Care to elaborate? We have only found evidence that our Dragon is causing these deaths on his own. My agents Price and Zeller, two elven forensics specialists, found teeth marks at the last crime scene that match ones from the previous family massacre."

He took a bite of the peach from Will with an approving nod, considering his thoughts before continuing, "So you have reason to believe there is an accomplice involved now?"

"Not exactly. I was... Taken in by the man in the castle on the hill." Will said, his mind fighting him to give this information, to keep it hidden and exclusive to his own mind. He'd been given a gift, argued his subconscious - power he'd never dreamed of, sight through new eyes, an offer of romance...

...Forced upon him unwillingly and coerced into horrible, violent thoughts that couldn't have been his, could only come from manipulation. Will had been gaslit into this.

Into helping Hannibal and freeing the sweet girl in the woods, into feeling safe and seen and being allowed to be vulnerable.

"Under the worst pretenses possible, I was fooled into trusting him and he nearly succeeded in something horrible." Will said with a scowl. "I can't be the only one he's tried to hurt, there must be more victims."

"So it is Count Lecter, then? I thought you said that those reports on him seemed exaggerated." Jack said, arms crossing over his chest as he searched Will's features. He didn't seem entirely convinced. "Whatever it is that you saw, you need to tell me exactly what happened so that we can take care of it properly. Did he hurt you?"

Will brought his hands up to thread into his hair and pushed it out of his face, voice thick as he chewed through his words. "Yes? No. I-- I think he's been indirectly feeding me his own blood, trying to make me get a taste for it, to enjoy it. I see him in all of my dreams."

He leaned against one of the cabinets in the room filled with paperwork. "He's a warlock I think, with an extremely high skill ceiling when it comes to the spells he can use, possibly more advanced dark magic. He's used anima spells before and a connection to his house so strong it's like it's breathing. Uh, he also has... Fangs. I don't know what he is other than that, fangs, anima, high level of magic... I've never heard of anything like him before but he managed to draw me in and keep me close for a long time."

I still want to go back to him, he thought. But what does he do to others that he must have done to me?

Jack's brows came together as he tried to process. "Will..." His voice dropped with concern, the skepticism clear in the lines on his forehead. "We're going to need solid proof. Nightmares and theories do not a monster make."

Will's heart sank as Jack spoke, weighing him into the ground as if he had donned a pair of lead boots. He was right - did he have any actual proof of this? Or did he just start going off at the man like a crazy person?

"Uh..." He said, suddenly feeling aimless, not sure how he could create a goal from so little. He raised two fingers to his forehead, thinking about the cut that had been there… Which was now gone. 'Really Good At Healing' wasn't exactly a dangerous trait.

All he knew about this man was what he had been trusted to keep a secret, and had been specifically told that under the guise of being faithful.

"All I have are... My words." He said coldly. "He tells me that he made a deal with a horrible beast and sacrificed his sister for power, and coerced me into helping him." Coerced... By listening to him in am intimate conversation and convincing Will he was worth being valued.

"He is wickedly strong, smart, and devastatingly fast, as well."

"Alright then, why do you think that he told you all this then? Why you?" Jack was pressing further, urgent. It was clear that he had an idea what Hannibal was and whatever it was has shaken him just from the thought.

Will clenched his teeth, fingernails scraping the wood of the cabinet. Why him.

"He said... We're alike. I thought the same." He said softly. "But we're not." His volume increased with this sentence. "He was probably only using me to excorcise the spirits around his mansion. Only after I was finished is when he tried to... Seduce me."

He made the connection as he said it, feeling twice as dirty as he had scraping his teeth through rabbit's blood.

"Again, Will, we are going to need proof." Jack reiterated. "If he is trying to seduce you..." He continued, visibly uncomfortable, "Perhaps we could use that to trap him."

There was truth to what Jack was saying, but Will hated every word of it. He'd known the answer, and to physically hear it was worse. He thought for a long moment, considering this.

"What if we set up something which forces conflict from the Great Red Dragon?" He said, gesticulating with one finger in the air. "That... Something is going to happen at his party, possibly. The one I've seen in the papers?"

Jack's face lit up slightly with the realization. "If we somehow could get those forces to collide we may be able to take care of two monsters."

Displeasure settled back into him after a split second. "However, a heavily public setting like that is hardly ideal for some power struggle between monster and dragon, Will."

"It wouldn't hurt to mention that he has something planned." Will suggested. "Previously l hadn't considered Hannibal to be a social person, but if he's having this gathering he must be trying to pick himself up, try to enter the spotlight again. It wouldn't bode well for his status to be threatened, or to be inconvenienced by a threat like that."

"So if the Dragon were to take that spotlight for a moment..." Jack began, "It may trigger the Count to do something rash and out of character, yes?"

"Without any major changes he's bound to stick to his routines, and things he knows will succeed." Will agreed.

He knew very well this was a risk. Putting people in danger for the sake of saving others wasn't the most composed or intelligent plan, but lately everything involving Hannibal was upheld by chaos and unknown variables. Things may change just yet, and they wouldn't be able to see it.

"It'd be easy for me to tell him, he seems invested in my well being to an extent." He said, quashing the beginnings of guilt with a reminder of what had happened directly following Mischa's union.

"Alright. But how do we catch the interest of the Dragon?" Jack asked, allowing him to continue. "It doesn't exactly seem like the type to show up to a party." He paused for a moment, letting his head tilt back slightly. "Unless… He saw it as an opportunity to prove his power."

Will nodded, chewing on his bottom lip. "He only kills on the full moon." He said, knowing he and Jack were on the same page. "So... Convince Hannibal somehow to have the party then. That way the timelines are the same. Both of them are arrogant enough to consider clashing over it, Hannibal being proud of his image and The Dragon being proud of his tableaus."

"Are you sure you could persuade Dr. Lecter? You have what, three weeks?" Jack said as he turned around and opened a cabinet to draw out a bottle of scotch and two glasses. He placed one in front of Will, serving them both two fingers of whiskey.

"Yes." Will says with confidence in his voice that the inside of him cannot hope to muster, tipping his head back to swallow the whiskey down and wishing, if anything, it burned more.

Three weeks. He had three weeks to, essentially, wait. He couldn't go back today, (and didn't want to) but he would have to within the next week or so if he wanted to at least plant the idea in Hannibal's head.

"By the way, would you have any sort of idea what kind of beast he is? Or if he is one?" He said offhandedly, but listening carefully.

Before Jack answered he took his glass of whiskey and shot it down with one swig, scrunching his face as it went.

"I have an idea, and I am desperately hoping that it's the wrong one," He sighed, "But he sounds very much like a Nosferatu, an entity ambued with the power of Satan himself. For something less specific I'd call him a Vampyr, an immortal and undead demon." Jack looked at the bottle of scotch with a sour gaze and poured them both another glass after a short bit of hesitation.

As soon as Jack had handed Will a second glass of scotch he immediately dropped it, the glass shattering across the hard floor of the room and skittering across the surface.

Hannibal was pressed into his back once again, hands spread across Will's chest. His full lips were mouthing words against the nape of his neck that Will didn't understand, and he felt like his spine was burning.

"Ngh..." He exclaimed, holding his palms to his eyes and pushing until he saw his own blood vessels. "Fuck, sorry." He shook his head furiously to try and get the imagery and the heat out of his body before stopping to try and scoop up the glass with his hands. No. Hannibal wasn't there, he was alone with Jack, he was in control.

"Sorry, I just... Sometimes I remember those nightmares like a trigger went off in my head, a-and everything just..." He clenched his teeth, stammering into silence.

Had Hannibal been there? A Vampyr, as Jack had called him? Of course he'd made a deal with Satan, to sacrifice your own sister wasn't an act of some sprite or a simple demon, and Hannibal's powers were nothing to shake a stick at either, case in point - was he here? Was he listening?

"Do you have any written work on the Vampyr... Anything I could take with me?" He said desperately, wanting to refrain from speaking out loud anymore, lest he was listened in on, his paranoia returning like an old blanket.

"It's going to be fine, Will. I have a few books that should help you get familiar as well as for some confirmation in the knowledge that we found the type of monster he is. From what you

have described, even the nightmares are a symptom of a vampire's infatuation."

Jack stood and opened a trunk in the corner to rifle through several books before he withdrew two large tomes and several leather bound journals. One of the bigger volumes was bound in animal hide the color of blood, and the front said The Book of Cain.

"Read and learn as much as you can, we need as much of an advantage as we can get."

"Yeah." Will said with a grunt as he maneuvered the books in his arms, the smell of old leather filling his nostrils as he left the building as quickly as he could. "Thanks."

The word 'infatuation' rang around in his head like tinnitus, peaking at various pitches. His nightmares were obviously due to the consumption of the blood Hannibal had fed him, but what kind of "infatuation" were they talking about here? The... Obsession kind? Love? Was there an infatuation of hatred?

The word branded itself into his mind as if he had leaned into a hot iron, but he would have preferred the pain over the blissful, tempting alternative.

Chapter End Notes

Hummana hummana.

Here's what Harley looks like, by the way. She's one of Will's canonical dogs! I treasure her.

https://twitter.com/PrinceWellMatt/status/1320444174664159232?s=19

In Which Francis Finds Meaning In Soap

Chapter Summary

Will reads a book. Chiyoh lands a hit. Francis takes a bath.

I'd also like to OFFICIALLY date this chapter by saying that it's posted on the fourth day of the 2020 presidential voting race. Nevada has been stagnant, Destiel is canon, Putin is stepping down and we're so, so very tired of being so stressed all the time, so please enjoy a break on us.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The books felt a pound heavier with every step as Will made his way into his clearing, expression stony. He passed Buster on his way in.

"You know kid, you've been smellin' real strangelike lately." Said the old dog, twitching his snout in Will's direction.

"Yeah, okay." Sighed Will, adding that on to things that of course must be wrong. His mood lightened a little when Winston, two legged, bounded up to him as he usually did, followed close by Harley, four legged and very purple around her peach-blonde little mouth.

"I've been picking berries with my hands!" Winston said excitedly, showing Will his purple digits.

"I can see that." Will acknowledged, scratching Harley under her chin with great effort to balance his books.

"What do you have? Is for me?" Harley asked and promptly knocked the books out of his hand.

"No, they're my books. They're... Stories." He explained clumsily, picking them up carefully and sitting upon a knit wool blanket that he had found about a year prior, the color faded and seams scuffed.

"Can you read to us?" Winston said, immediately forgetting about the berries in his eagerness to do something else that had caught his attention.

"Uh, yeah. Yeah, I can read to you." Will replied, opening the blood red tome and swallowing around the knot in his throat. "Uhh, here's the index, note from the author, blah blah..."

Very quickly Will realised that a large part of the book was focused on the biblical story of Cain and Abel. Cain, the first murderer punished by god for the death of his brother, was cursed to live for all eternity as a demon, feasting upon the blood of the living. He was the first Vampire specifically, and from him descended a long line of immortal demons cursed with a blood-borne infection that filled them with the power of Satan himself. It gave them the strength and stamina of 50 men, creating within them the drive to be true masters of seduction, drawing humans in to exist alongside mortals to tempt them into damnation.

Harley and Winston seemed disinterested immediately but stayed around the clearing to bring him little things now and again, like sticks or rocks or bugs.

As Will read, he could feel a heavy weight growing to settle in the pit of his stomach. Several of the journals and books speculated weaknesses such as daylight, silver, holy water, or a stake to the heart, (Will could almost feel Hannibal saying *Who wouldn't perish from that?*) But past that, many weaknesses seemed to be fitted to individual demons, their bodies picking and choosing what they were vulnerable to like allergies.

The most likely vulnerability Will could pick out would be silver. He could find a silver plated knife, he thought. It wouldn't be hard to carry with him.

"Often vampires obey the four stages of demonic possession." He read on.

Stage one: Infestation, in which the vampire creates contact with the chosen individual, filling their dreams with sinful temptations of bloody and carnal pleasures. The "victim" will begin to hear voices and experience phenomena similar to being haunted.

The second stage: Oppression. The victim will begin to experience bouts of restless and insatiable aggression as well as infatuation with the predator. Voices will increase in frequency plus mood swings and nightmares will persist. Such experiences will be arguably pleasant and unpleasant at the same time. Because of these things, the victim will be tempted to withdraw from regular activities and focus on their symptoms and the predator that bestowed such things upon them.

The third stage: Obsession. The victim is preoccupied and hardly functioning outside of thoughts of any and all afflictions. The victim will begin to notice marks and bruising on their bodies, closed wounds since healed that they don't remember acquiring. Sleep is nearly impossible. The victim begins to be unsure whether they are awake or dreaming.

He hadn't noticed any injuries, but this was a small comfort compared to the growing feeling inside him one knows only when they hear a list of symptoms they have already observed.

The last stage is Possession, in which the victim maintains basic grasp of their free will but is horrendously compromised. During the affliction the individual becomes physically, mentally, and spiritually unstable. The first three stages of possession will leave them with inhuman strength, ravaging thirst and hunger for the blood of the living, voices and thoughts of others clear in one's mind (telepathic phenomenon). Incredible agility…….

He skipped around pages, feeling everything all at once, too raw and intimate on his nerves.

"Vampires are well known for using seduction to pull a victim in order to kill and eat them immediately." He said in hushed tones under his breath, reading the sentence over and over. Why was it taking so damn long for Hannibal to do it then? What was the point of all this... Blood feeding and voices in his head if Hannibal was trying to kill him, he asked himself? Because if it truly was to possess him, to turn him, he was taking his sweet time.

There was also an issue in that Will didn't feel seduced. He hadn't been attracted to Hannibal because of his body but instead their shared trauma, his cadence and intelligence, his kind eyes with just a hint of darkness in them, just like his own. Hannibal hadn't known enough about him to be able to ascertain what would make him a good friend, he had just been himself before any of this shit started happening, right? Was it part of obsession that Will had begun to simply like him for who Hannibal was? Did vampires cry in front of those they wished to charm? Did vampires create a want and need inside of someone to protect them and to be protected by them?

He put the book down beside him and just yelled, his voice messy and all over the place in pitch. One of the wolves joined in and soon there was a cacaphony of noise in the forest to scare the birds from their perches, and Will kept yelling, aggression from anger boiling in his bones as he tore the blanket upwards with his hands, squeezing his eyes shut as the light from the trees became too much to bear again, and suddenly everyone was too loud and he could only cover his head.

"Be gentle with yourself, darling." Hannibal said in his head and Will tore some of his hair out.

"No. No, you don't care about me, you don't." He hissed.

"What kind of monster do you truly take me for? Am I but a textbook case for you, my dear boy?"

"Yes! No, no…!" Will moaned, head falling onto his knees. "Nothing about this is textbook but everything is at the same time, all of the elements are there!"

"But we all write our own stories with the same materials, don't we? As soon as you were written into mine, I started a new chapter to begin my descension into the sequel-to-be." Echoed the smooth voice, accent slipping in and out of each word.

"You can't fool me."

"I can't. You're different."

"NO I'M NOT!" Will screamed, and suddenly he was not in the clearing anymore, he was near the corpse of the rabbit he'd killed, the tiny body filled with maggots and a thin spiderweb, and Will didn't know how he got there so fast, he'd just been trying to step away for a moment.

"You are not the rabbit," Crooned who sat at the base of his skull, the voice in his ears also landing in hot raindrops on his shoulders, sliding down his back like the beginning of a hot

shower. "I am not the hunter. We are both the hunters, and God should work fast to grant forgiveness to our prey, lest they enter hell prematurely."

The property had been unusually quiet in the forest where Chiyoh resided. Tucked among the ancient trees, she lived in a small cottage, content in her solitude. Hannibal had long since stopped caring whether or not she was physically within the castle itself and he had learned to prefer it this way, just as she did. However, this was as far away from him as she was allowed to get. She was a Murasaki, tied to the land through him, and - like everything on the property - belonged to Hannibal.

The quiet began to tug alarm bells behind Chiyoh's ears. Where was she? Violet eyes fell closed as she tried to reach out amongst the forest, scanning through fog and fallen birch trees. A lump began to build in her throat as her heart raced to panic in her chest, searching fervently for the tiny blue blip.

She couldn't hear Mischa crying anywhere.

Her eyes snapped open, unfocused as they began to spill over with tears of blood, her lower lip catching in her teeth as it quivered. Desperately, she tried to reach out with her mind again but the only souls she could sense were the dozens of human men on the grounds that Hannibal had hired to start renovations of the exterior, taking on a crew to care for crumbling grounds and garden, dead trees and broken cobblestone.

Focusing enough to come back to herself, she grit her teeth and sniffed, trying to maintain her sense of composure. He had done something to her. He had "disposed" of Mischa after so long, and Chiyoh felt her absence, the tiny, lonely girl's presence no longer near her, no longer soothing with melancholy comfort.

A new loneliness bloomed within the trees that was uniquely Chiyoh's, a deep blue violet aura that rolled off the leaves like fog. She felt the sun breaking up tiny pockets of wind and clarity of the air in the absence of Mischa's suffering.... No. In the absence of Hannibal's suffering.

Chiyoh heard it clearly when she gripped the counter top too tightly, sharp claws cracking into the stone, snapping and crushing it in her fist. Hannibal had used his new toy investigator to free Mischa's spirit from the forest, therefore freeing himself of her cries for him. Truly a backhanded, self serving kindness to their youngest sister; but he hadn't let Chiyoh say goodbye.

The man in contempt was currently across the land that they shared in a comfortable haze from a specially procured glass of wine, pleasantly buzzed as thoughts of dark eyelashes and soft sighs under his touch swam in and out of his attention, never landing on a fantasy long enough to study it.

His vision was hazy with gluttonous intoxication even as the air bent and a plume of violet energy burst forth when Chiyoh was there to lunge at him, her eyes illuminated bright lavender with her rage.

"Where is she, Hannibal!? Where is Mischa!?" She had his throat in her steel grip within an instant, forcing him onto his back as he fell hard against the floor with the force of Chiyoh's body hitting him like a train, her boot firmly planted in his chest as her claws dug into his throat.

He opened his mouth to speak around his dearest weapons, stained with his over indulgent meal, voice rasping and thick.

"Will Graham... Put her to peace. She is ss..safe, I assurey- I assure you."

The woman snarled and pressed her full body weight into her foot. "No, he put you to peace!! It was your suffering he ended, not Mischa's!"

"He wanted to help me ... Bec- cause, he is my friend...!" He blinked lazily at Chiyoh, the picture of nonchalance, and she flew backwards off of him when he waved a hand at her dismissively, swatting her off of him like a pest. She landed hard on the stone floor, tumbling backwards and sliding on her knees. It had been nothing. She had complete control until she had none of it, only given to her to allow her fleeting, useless confidence.

Hannibal stood and brushed his hands delicately down the front of his jacket before he immediately was struck again, sent reeling as she hit him with a closed fist to the face. The first blow landed with a firm crunch to the bridge of his nose, the second drawing blood from his nostrils upper lip.

She held him by the front of his jacket now, her fist drawn back anew, eyes wide with fury and violence as Hannibal's blood shone in the light from the fire, smeared on her knuckles and speckled on her pretty face. "You took her from me. Again!" She cried, her voice cracking with horrible, painful emotion that she usually dare not access so recklessly.

Hannibal sniffed as he looked up at her, the serene mask on his face unbroken. This was to be expected, he mused - Mischa was Chiyoh's favorite person in the world at the time, having just as much impact on her as she did on him. Perhaps this was therapeutic, to be able to strike him once or twice, the fear of his response left on the sidelines.

"There would be no peace found for her suffering in the place of my sin." He said gently. "[7]Will Graham offered to free her, and I said yes. I didn't think Mischa could ever have the peace she needed on this plane until Will told me it could be possible for her to move on."

Chiyoh gave a halting, strained little sigh of frustration. It was true beyond all doubt Hannibal hadn't wanted Mischa to suffer, but he was foolish if he thought that he could trick her of all people to believe him so selfless. This was just as much for him as it was her, and it seemed ridiculous to even attempt to convince her otherwise. Truer still, he specifically wanted this new friend to free him from his torment. He had shown himself to Will Graham in a way Hannibal wouldn't even discuss with her, leaving her to draw her conclusions on wit and research alone.

Every bit of his past had been revealed to this twitchy little investigator and the man's conclusion had been to justify himself further into it, instead of finding a way to run.

She looked down at Hannibal as her eyes widened with a realization that came to her as it was spoken into existence. "You don't want to possess him, you want him to become something on his own."

The monster blinked up at her contentedly, his eyes heavy with that same drunkenness, completely at ease. "And what a transformation it has been so far."

The night of the full moon was closer every hour, and Francis was far from being prepared.

"No point." He said softly, rubbing a spot on his leathery wrist that he had been sure the woman had touched, over and over it with the pad of his thumb.

"Surely you can't be serious." She said, her beautiful voice hanging in the air long enough to grow a trellis as each consonant bloomed within her words. "Who doesn't see the point in soap? It can't be a cultural thing, can it? I could have sworn I sold some soap to a Dragonborn not three days ago."

Francis shook his head, running his tongue over his teeth. They felt dull. "Not cultural really, but I'll just... Get dirty again." He grunted.

"Ohhh, I see." She nodded, her white eyes glinting in the sunlight coming through the window of her shop. "Well, don't you like how it feels after you're clean? Or how you smell once you scrub off a layer of grime?"

He sniffed himself at this, and she laughed again. It made him jump slightly, and he nearly knocked over a little pile of glass vials, which tinkled cheerily and earned him a 'whoops!' from the monk in front of him. He had half a mind to continue the process of knocking them over just to prove he was too big for the shop to hold him, until she spoke again.

"Or perhaps you've simply not had one of my soaps." She said, feeling the countertops with her fingertips so she could skim them across two wide aisles, crossing the path of one other patron that was perusing a block of something yellow. "In that case, I'll start you off with my favorite scent. You'll be able to wash your scales until they sparkle like diamonds-"

"-Ruby." He interrupted.

She didn't seem affected. "...Rubies and smell like roses, and you'll be thanking me, I'll bet my bottom dollar."

"...Mm." Francis grunted.

"Is that a yes?" She chirped back at him, her hair bouncing about her cherubic face and charming smile.

If he answered a yes, his tongue would scrape over his least favorite sound.

"Uh huh."

"Terrific news, mister..."

Well - no avoiding that, but... He could tell her this once.

"F..... Francisss."

"Francis. A good hardy name for a hefty adventurer like yourself!" She said as she turned to the counter, and he actually liked the sharp hiss of his name from her. He liked a lot of things about her - for instance, the way she treated him as a bull in her china shop.

He left with a tiny fabric bag full of soap that he committed himself to using later in the evening, holding it carefully in one clawed hand as he once again passed the other patron in the shop to leave, a man with long hair tied back in a bow that didn't seem particularly interested in his surroundings.

Francis' house was small, ramshackled, and a little cramped. He owned pieces of exercise equipment that he often left around the place, having decided long ago that if he were to live on his own he would do what he pleased with his things, even if others would think it was bad. He thought it was good, and he knew where everything was, and everyone was usually wrong anyways when it came to things involving him.

Except for her. She might have a point, about washing. His scales sometimes came off when he was stretching, revealing new, shiny ones underneath.... Like Rubies.

After dropping off the bag of vegetables he had purchased at the farmer's market, he decided perhaps that he'd walk to the stream and try the soap, just as an experiment to see how it smelled. The stream wasn't far, and he wanted to stretch his long legs anyway, and could do it better outside of the cramped hallways of his residence.

As he walked along the pathways through where he lived, he passed other little cabins here and there and observed them well as he always did. One belonged to another single Dragonborn man, but he was blue and very big and Francis didn't like to stand next to him. One was a cabin with two elven women in it, and one of the elves was pregnant, but she wasn't showing too much yet. There was a man on the path he passed, the same dandy from the soap shop, paper bag in hand as they passed each other on the road. The last cabin he walked past he knew had an old fellow that lived in it, but he didn't know much about him because he stayed inside a lot. Francis didn't like that, because he enjoyed watching people even if they didn't do much.

He only enjoyed closely watching specific types of people though. He didn't like watching happy families because they were always faking something and putting on performances like it was a theater show, laughing and yelling and praising each other. It was gross and unrealistic and dirty and fake. Just thinking about families made Francis nearly crush his soap - but he wouldn't, because the monk lady had made it with her own hands. It would be

disrespectful. He wondered idly if she had a family, but dismissed it within an instant, for nothing about her had been fake.

When he made it to the stream he simply waded in, his pants soaking up the cool water and little bits of dirt floating off and away from them gently, wandering their way down to the silt that covered the bottom. This area had just a little bit of algae, because it was a stiller part of the bend and could settle a little. It parted the trees kindly, and created an 's' of blue cloudy sky. He could see the sun if he squinted.

As he lathered the soap clumsily onto the tough skin on his hands, he thought again about the privileges the moon always granted him, and hoped for her to return as quickly as she could.

Chapter End Notes

As always, leave a comment, get a treat. Simple as. Today we're thinking biscuits.

In Which Will Ends A Life

Chapter Summary

> Will enters a Dire situation. Hannibal does some DIY. Today is a horrible day to kill your local shopkeep.

The nightmares didn't stop. Every night Will found himself startling awake, loud gasps as if he had been released from a chokehold jarring the camp and making his pack raise their heads in surprise until they realized it was only him. It had started to disrupt the flow of their days, and they began to get irritated with lack of sleep. Will decided to spend his nights by the stream more often to combat this and give them more rest - he liked the sound of the water anyway, and the guilt from his noises as well as the anger from their reasonable irritation kept him away more often.

At one point in town, after a considerably bad dream consisting of the graphic slaughter of little Harley, trusting and affectionate even in the hands of a great horned beast, Will found himself buying pork buns at the bakery with a few silver pieces.

"Dirty vagrant. Smells like wet mutt." Said the baker, and Will snarled at him. Usually he let those things slide, but lately he had been more prone to snapping, even going so far as to hurt Winston's feelings when he had jumped on him the day before by implying the boy had been bad that day.

It was a moment before he realised his growl had been a response to something the baker hadn't said out loud.

(Telepathic phenomenon) he recalled, paying the baker and taking the pork buns into his satchel, breaking one apart with his hands as he started his walk back, chewing on the meat inside.

The bread tasted a bit like sand, which he didn't want to think about, not yet. He finished it in three bites, each one harder to swallow, but the meat tasted fine, if not a little bland.

"I'm going up the hill." He told Winston, who didn't jump on him today, and Harley, who licked his hands happily clean of his snack. The man looked at his younger brother with a gaze that the pup would know was genuine.

"Hey." He made two little whistle noises before Winston made eye contact with him. "I love you."

Winston's mouth opened in a grin, and he stuck his tongue out. "I love you too." The boy responded sweetly. He had never been the type to hold a grudge. "Me too!" Harley agreed

amicably because she liked being included.

"It's been a week and a half since I last left on business, so I'm sure this snack will tide you over until I next return?"

"Yes yes yes." Both siblings giggled, eyes squinting with their expressions, alight with adoration, Winston's tail whapping Harley in the nose.

It was with a sigh that Will unloaded the rest of his bag of foodstuffs and trekked back up the hill almost against his own wishes. He had to plant the idea of the full moon into Hannibal's mind for his party. He wasn't going to ask for blood, he wasn't going to beg or plead for a release - this couldn't last forever, and he'd ride it out now that he knew what to avoid, and now that he knew exactly what was happening.

He kept himself from feeling anything after finding he wasn't even slightly winded as he was greeted with a strange feeling and sight. Leading up the path as Will walked he could see it had been cleared wider, the edges cleaned out where nature had closed in and branches reached and tugged at hair and clothes. Now there was no reaching, no branches or greenery tugging at Will's curls and pants.

The grounds started absolutely exploding with life as Will began to catch glimpses and his mind caught wind of workers on ladders and scaffolding next to landscapers laying fresh flowers in beds around the entrance as the druid walked up.

It was odd to see the gate cleared of rust, polished to shine and impressive in the sunlight. All the duck grass had been pulled, the cobblestone built up again with plasters and mud that was slowly drying in the warmth of early afternoon.

He was outside, Will realised as he made his way through. Hannibal was outside and he could feel him there - his mind was all over the place, and Will tentatively reached out with the green vines of his searching presence to see more, but immediately could tell he'd been detected, the man's energy shifting toward his after only a split second.

(He knew what he wouldn't be doing again.)

The gate didn't so much as creak as he walked right in, putting both hands in his pockets as he surveyed the different worksman going about their business on the grounds. The trees lining the walkway had all been tied to sturdy poles to keep them from bending, he noted. It was an interesting touch. It felt odd without the weeds - emptier, but more organized as a result, he supposed. He started scanning the property for the familiarity of maroon eyes.

He managed to find the Count quickly, hot pulses of energy focused at the back of the estate where the courtyard and statue garden were. Off to the right side by a few meters was a glass dome that encased a very sturdy greenhouse. Will felt Hannibal's reaction like a pebble dropped in still water before he came around the corner completely and they stood in one another's lines of sight.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Graham."

"Dr. Lecter." Will greeted. It was odd, seeing him now after everything he knew. A first meeting all over again. He felt awkward, too big for his shoes. He'd paid special attention today to his own hair, and had braided it back carefully into itself so it hung in a short plait down the base of his neck and out of his face, save for some flyaways. He also had re-ribboned his shirt, tied over his collarbone with baby blue in a tight bow. It wasn't much, but he was washed, clean and hopefully better suiting to Hannibal's standards.

Will couldn't quite pin why he'd done it. Perhaps he wanted to make sure he stayed in good graces. Perhaps he simply wanted to please him, because whenever Hannibal smiled it made his damn stomach flip. There was nothing specifically worse about either option, he reasoned.

"Is there a statue made of yourself around here somewhere, or is that inside where you can always look at it?" He asked cheekily.

"Fortunately, that likeness is long destroyed." Hannibal chided as he moved close to Will's side, his gaze sweeping across the shorter man's features as if memorizing exactly what he looked like in this moment. Without Hannibal saying a thing about it, Will knew he found him beautiful. It was not as unsettling as it could have been for him.

"To what do I owe the great pleasure of your company?" Their fingers brushed each other's for a split second, and they both were momentarily young and nervous. Will forgot immediately what he had come for - he could have come to kill right then and there, and he would have forgotten how and why.

"Well." He answered as a sort of filler, folding his arms so his hands stayed amongst his own space and he could regain a modicum of his ability to process thought. He had to unfold his arms again once he remembered he had something in his bag, taking out the clipping from the paper he'd bought the day before, holding it up.

"Found this and had to come back to figure out how you were going to manage." He said, and he knew it sounded weak, so he supplemented it with a look to Hannibal. It was... Appropriate to seem like he was grasping at straws, given how the man had looked at him.

(Will was hit with his first wave of genuine mistrust in himself, and Hannibal had barely even said anything. Was this the right choice??)

"I guess I forgot that you're completely and filthily rich and can hire help. I've no idea why you'd need me to help with hors d'oeuvres anyway, if I'm honest."

"You needn't any sort of excuse if you simply wish to pay me a visit." The Count said smoothly, walking in step with Will around the stone garden, freshly laid white granite gravel crunching under foot. "But if you are so keen I'm sure I can find some way to put you to work." He said cheekily, his joke surprising Will so much that he actually laughed aloud.

"With such a tempting paycheck that paid for," he gestured at the marble statues, each of them expertly crafted, naked and artistically posed, "an erotic sculpture garden? Why Mister Lecter sir, that's a tempting offer." His smile remained, and this time he didn't really think about how it looked. "Alright, so perhaps after being treated to a considerable dose of your

companionship I have been left unimpressed by the simple company of my family alone. Is it wrong to perhaps..." He shrugged. "Want a glimpse of the man of the hour when he's not being swarmed by a gaggle of the rich and prosperous?"

Hannibal sighed playfully, looking around as if searching for an answer as he observed the garden. There was a very simple illusion spell at work inside of it - for Will saw the statues as various figures of mythologies instead of what he had really created to display. Available currently was a classic marble piece depicting Cain and Abel. It stood in the center of a path hedged with dense rose bushes that Hannibal planted to remind himself of when Will remarked on his eyes.

The true statues were all carved into the likeness of Will Graham. Every figure, every pose, every face of the polished stone was Will's, and it was Hannibal's little secret.

"I am honored to have your company whenever you fall upon the whim to grace me with it, and I am also honored that our liking for each other's company is mutual, but I can't imagine you will be keeping me company when all the guests begin to arrive, Will?" Hannibal asked as an open and a clear invitation, even knowing how Will felt about large crowds.

Will caught his breath where it sat idle and his heart sped up in his chest. He was here for a reason, he reminded himself. Not to allow himself to become Hannibal's pet, hanging off his arm to be an accessory in order to chat about libraries and fancy foods, possibly following the Count's gaze as he tracked down prey to follow Will as a feast.

It was a dark train of thought that led him down and he came upon the feeling of missing again, of being incomplete and disassembled by hand, only this time he knew all too well what would put him back together.

"I'm not one for parties." He said after a long pause, and Hannibal could read him like a book, knew exactly how his eyes felt as they were sinking into the concaves of his face, exhaustion and the feeling of loss making his energy flicker.

"No, I thought not." Hannibal said pleasantly.

"I'm surprised you're not throwing the whole thing on the night of the full moon. It's only a few days before."

"Why the full moon? An interesting request, considering you will not be in attendance. Is it simply for the pageantry of her fond gaze?"

"For the romance of it." Will said, well aware that his request was bizzarre but at the same time feeling it was realistic enough to work. The other question he had to ask was not as easy to stomach, and he knew that the time to do so was drawing ever closer. This was easy, it was banter he could handle. "You like it when things are just so. When your pencil is carved to a fine point for your sketches, when the fork and knife are lined up on the table next to the plate... I guess I figured having the blood moon high in the sky on the day you present yourself was something you'd do."

Will saw color pool in Hannibal's cheeks, the Count suddenly overcome with a youthful shyness. "Oh well, perhaps you don't know me too well after all, Will. That idea hadn't even occurred to me." He admitted.

They had walked a full circle around the garden, and Will took the opportunity to take the steps up to the Cain and Abel statue, squinting at the bit of warping on the edges. Even this had energy about it, it seemed. The statue's faces bent slightly and his eyes were gently compelled to look away from the faces and move to details elsewhere, and he complied with the whim.

"It also never occurred to me that you were so fond of flattery Will - unless in flattering me you wish to distract me from something else that happens to be bothering you." Hannibal was at his side again, and he gently placed a relaxed hand on the back of his neck, encouraging the shorter man to look upwards at him more directly.

Though most touches from other people felt to Will like an electric shock, this one was careful to halt a second before landing in gentle warning. Hannibal took the time to make sure he didn't startle any part of Will, and it was kind, and it was nothing of the fucking monster Will knew he was and could be certain of, but the man didn't seduce him in a way that anyone would be well prepared to face. It was a seduction that actually cared about him, and hadn't he wanted that for years? To feel drunk on touch alone, for the rush of eye contact to stem from something other than panic?

"Hannibal, when I... Drank from you that night, I murdered a rabbit with my bare hands."

He didn't know why he'd said it. There was no use in saying that, and it wouldn't get him any information, but Hannibal's face didn't change from it's content fondness. They began to walk again, led by Will as he tried to find something to do that wasn't idle, as close to pacing as he could get.

"And how did you feel?" Hannibal gestured to sit with him on a marble bench under an archway draped with grape vines. Their knees brushed as they faced each other and sat close, speaking in hushed tones.

Will paled slightly - this was real and they were discussing it as such. Hannibal had felt it too, and this wasn't like telling anyone else, it was telling someone who knew and who understood... Who had forced it on him. He had to remember it was forced on him.

"It's nearly indescribable. I felt... I felt in control, like there was nothing holding me back from accomplishing anything I wanted, and that was what I wanted, and I don't know why." He said, and he felt like someone was pulling air out of his chest with a rope. "I wasn't even especially good at it or powerful, it was just a rabbit. It was small and weak and I- I- I tore it apart with my teeth."

He spread his hands, palms facing the sky and looked down at them and up to Hannibal. "I just *wanted to. I wanted to see what it felt like, and now that I know I feel like I don't know anything anymore." He looked to Hannibal now, desperate in his torment and confusion. "I can't fucking sleep, Hannibal, and I know it's because of something you did, I know you did this, and I need to know why. That's why I came."*

Hannibal drew in his bottom lip with a little hum.

"I wanted to share with you what I am in my entirety, transparently." He said it as if it is the simplest of answers to the simplest of questions. "I did promise you honesty, Will. Would you rather I have lied to you, to continue on a comfortable path built on untruth? Because I will of course change my path, if that is what you desire." He gently caressed Will's cheek, sweeping flyaway curls off his forehead with broad strokes of his thumb.

Will felt his eyelashes fluttering, his heartbeat growing faint in his chest, but he held steady to what he knew, what he was sure of.

"You don't need to lie to me to get me to do what you want, Hannibal." He said, and the sentence was a double edged sword - because he knew now that if a vampire wanted, they could force anyone to do anything.

"When do I stop feeling like this?" He added before the other could reply, raising his left hand to press it to the right of his cheek, catching Hannibal's wrist lightly. "How long does it take to wear off, what you did?" *How I feel, how I'm craving that power again like a drug, how I want that connection to someone else again, He left unsaid.*

"Then I won't lie. This is the truth - the only way you will stop feeling like you do now is to indulge yourself, Will, to discover things that you haven't looked for due to fear of the unknown." Hannibal said, unblinking, and Will could barely take in the information before the other man was changing the subject.

"Would you possibly be inclined to honor me with your company before guests arrive if I move my party up the few days to the blood moon?"

The invitation for him to join the Count again was laden with suggestion, but tainted by the fact that the man had just admitted, calmly and without a trace of regret, that Will would never be rid of this. That it was either to indulge himself, or regret not making that choice. It was spoken confirmation that life without Hannibal in it would be nightmarish, sleepless, painful and cold.

Fury built up at the base of his spine and made the colors of the garden dull. Will was usually so expressive, an open book with every emotion, and it took all of his self control to remain taciturn, to allow himself to continue touching the other and resist the need to find some way, any way to destroy him with his bare hands and teeth, just like the rabbit.

But he hadn't a chance now, so he forced himself to remain soft, running his tongue over his bottom lip as if remembering the taste of Hannibal's wrist.

"Yes. I can do that."

"I'll be honored to have you, dear Will." Hannibal's serene mask remained in place as he restrained his own feeling of dark glee.

Will wanted to destroy him, and he felt it. There was no hiding how poisonous they were for each other anymore and Hannibal could feel thorned vines twisting and digging into the

edges of his mind.

Will knew at that point he needed to leave, to get out of there, to release everything inside of him again as he had last time without a thought for the regret after, but Hannibal was still watching him as if he were reading a book, looking studious and attentive.

They talked in bits and pieces after that, but it was stilted and awkward. Will asked about the landscaping, backing up just barely so Hannibal couldn't touch him anymore, and he was answered him cooly - it was quiet and hushed and an outsider would think the conversation intimate, and in a way it was.

He only managed to escape after one of the men working on construction came over and whisked the Count away for a routine check, and the druid made his way out of the property, far enough that he couldn't feel Hannibal's aura like he could a breeze off the ocean, and he trotted down the hill and into town.

People watching would do. He could sit and he could be among the populace, and he could concentrate for the ten minutes he needed to Pass Without Trace, making himself unremarkable, unnecessary and forgettable. That way he could enter stores without being greeted, touch the cotton-wool blankets at the tailors without asking questions, and exist without being perceived. He moved through the village as a spirit himself, aimless as he tried to relax his tense, angry body.

Breathe in, breathe out. There's a new shop set up in town, an acupuncture business to replace the burned down candle store. No one was in the building at the moment, but the display window was filled with an odd combination of needles and honey.

Breathe in, breathe out. One of the druids in their human form was buying a bow and arrow from the weapons merchant, having to concentrate on order to keep his speech completely Common and unaffected by little yips and barks.

Breathe in, breathe out. There was a spirit in this area but she seemed content enough, and not something Will needed to focus on as she sang hymns in the church on the corner.

Breathe-- his sort of meditation was interrupted by a gunshot and the sound of shattering glass.

He whipped his head about to face the man who had shot the butcher point-blank in the face through his store window, laughing darkly and spitting on the mess he'd made. He was a medium sized man, dirty blonde hair and glasses, and his face was in a sneer. "What?" He said to a woman who was shaking and staring at him, hands on her mouth as she began to weep with fear.

"It's called quality control." He continued before breaking into a sprint, away from her and another teenage girl that ran to the murdered butcher with shaking hands, unsure of how to help. "Can't let meat of that quality into people's homes, it could be dangerous!"

He was around the corner in a sprint now, voice echoing off the stone buildings where people were looking out from their windows with concern.

Will started running too, his bones feeling like they had come out of their sockets, every muscle in his body tense as he gave chase.

The killer was inhumanly fast, and obviously some sort of rogue from the way he moved in between street lamps and fruit stalls and carts on the street, and Will couldn't possibly catch up with his magic being used in order to keep him unseen, so he ducked behind a building into an alley, dusty and covered in trash.

He bared his teeth and shifted, body cracking with broken and manipulated bone. This form took power and might and he found it in his anger, found it in the absolute fury within his mind at his situation, soon manifesting out of his mouth in a deafening snarl as he pounded out of the alley on all fours.

(Oh, how Hannibal would be so proud of this Dire Wolf.)

After using his Wild Shape it didn't take long for Will to find the murderer again and pounce on him in the street, grabbing him by the back of the neck and dragging him into a path off the main road. The man shrieked and threw a spell into his face with a wailing, spitting cry, and it singed the hair off a spot on his brow and the tips of his ears but Will kept running, shaking him like a toy, dragging him along the dirt road until he was bleeding.

"Help!" The man was screaming now, desperately trying to conjure another flame spell. Will wondered idly if he had used a gun earlier to be dramatic or if he was unused to conserving his magical energy.

The trail was farther away from the village now and Will had been too fast to follow, but he barely registered being caught as he dropped the man on the ground and stepped on him, getting shot in the shoulder just as he thought he'd gained the upper hand. The killer stared up at him through a bloody smile, his revolver pointing up at his head.

Will snarled and didn't give him the change to shoot again as he sunk his jaws into the lower half of the man's face and tore it off with a wet ripping sound.

He swallowed, unfeeling and untasting to look at his victim now. He was still alive, jaw missing, drowning in his own blood and choking on his unsupported tongue, weapon forgotten in his pain.

Will would have smiled back at him then and echoed his earlier laugh if he could, but instead he dove down once again to take his throat in one bite and completely remove his vocal chords. He was instantly dead at that, and Will was left panting harshly and feeling the rush of adrenaline still in his veins, still pumping through his limbs and ribs and spine.

It lasted until he reached his clearing, having abandoned the body in the field it was killed in, the wound from his shoulder healing enough to give him a less impressive mark when his wild shape disbanded, leaving him naked and shivering in the sudden cold. He had vomited until he was heaving, the excretion hot and dark.

He debated asking a member of his family to heal the wound, but decided within a very short conversation with himself that he deserved a reminder for what he'd done.

In Which Death Is But A Challenger

Chapter Summary

Francis is delighted. Hannibal is obsessed. Will cannot possibly understand.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings for this chapter are in the end notes <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Night fell over the grounds of the castle in one swift partnered dance between the moon and sun, and Hannibal found himself quite suddenly walking through his woods in the dark. It was a very peaceful walk and he reached a sort of catharsis on his stroll, enjoying how the thin soles of the shoes he had picked for the night allowed the nerve endings in his feet to meet the ground in a way that kept him connected to the little rocks and sticks of the earth. It was a few miles along the outside of town, down and over a hop skip and jump to find the small home in which Francis Dolarhyde lived.

It was a smallish cabin, homely and rather untidy, but Hannibal could tell from his gentle and noninvasive journey into Francis's mind that he enjoyed the cramped space. It made him feel in control and gave all the glory to his body alone, majestic as he believed it was.

There were pieces of scratched and overturned furniture within the small cabin that didn't seem out of place but the area also didn't seem particularly inhabited at the time, and his mind traipsed through darkness in a lazy wander to Francis's stream where he had been surrendering more and more of his time lately. Glistening red scales under the light of the moon peeled themselves away from a magnificent creature of beautiful form, and Hannibal couldn't help but take his fill of a great sight. Here sat a disillusioned little thing, a runt, a disfigured boy so utterly rejected that he had done the same to everyone who ever told him something he did not like, living with solid and uninhibited faith in himself and himself alone.

Faith in the Great Red Dragon.

Francis' tail skated over the water and he felt his great wings following close behind, creating ripples and stirring up the mud from the bottom layer of silt, clouding the great stillness. He

opened his mouth wide and blew a stream of fire into the algae, knowing it would quickly snuff itself out.

He had gone back to the soap shop from earlier in the week to buy more product and to see the owner, who he had learned was named Reba. She was soft spoken and nice and she navigated the store shelves with deft expertise despite being blind, and she drew him to her despite the two of them discussing nothing but bathing technique.

He had never felt cleaner or more mighty than he did now, and had made this a nightly routine, but he was still well aware of his surroundings and when they changed and shifted. This was his area now, and no one could move him from it.

"I'm afraid if you're waiting for a turn that I'll be here a long while." He said, turning and trying to look at the surrounding area in an attempt to glimpse whoever he could feel was watching. It was dark and his eyes kept frustratingly glazing over, keeping him from focusing on anything in particular.

"That is perfectly alright." The voice seemed to carry with a breeze through the trees. Branches bowed and shook as Francis caught a glimpse of a monster that appeared in the dark before a simple man stepped into the light of the moon.

He had a maroon velvet smoking jacket over his arm as he silently stepped over the stony bank to the edge of the stream, long hair whispering freely about his shoulders as he stood strong and tall.

"The temptation of the cool water isn't why I am here, please take your time."

"What, are you here to watch?" Francis growled, turning around to look at the man. He looked eerily familiar, but Francis couldn't tell where he'd seen him before. "I don't play well with other people. I think you can turn around and leave."

"I will not take up too much of your time." The man sat on a boulder next to the stream neatly, folding his legs and looking incredibly out of place among the roughness of the surrounding area. "I came as a courtesy. One beast to another." His body settled into a direct beam of moonlight filtered through a gap in the trees as the wind blew, and each time his figure was cast into shadow he seemed to completely disappear into darkness. He spoke in two tones, one low and even and one hauntingly musical as if it were a woodwind instrument.

"They are looking for you, Mr. Dolarhyde."

Francis froze, any level of comfort he had with a fellow monster falling out under him like a hangman’s platform.

“How...” he said, losing grip of his thoughts and gaping. The smoke that the man had disappeared into swirled among the burnt remains of algae, making the air smell acidic.

"Tis but a side effect of my condition - knowledge of much and many, but as an admirer, I can assure you your secret is safe with me." In soft wispy shadows Francis saw a smile flicker like the north star behind a weak fire.

"We are neighbors. My property is not far from here, should you ever feel inclined to visit for further conversation."

The next time he disappeared into the shadows he did not come back again.

An admirer, Francis thought through his own fog that existed only within his ponderings. Someone who knew what he thought he kept tucked tight within himself, a secret that he ached to reveal but that no one would understand. He ached to learn further, he needed more information - how many people knew? Were they pleased admirers like this man, or were they planning on catching him and pinning him down like a wild serpent?

The Dragonborn scrambled out of the water and started shoving his clothes on while he was still wet. For some reason he'd never been more willing to talk to someone or so eager to create a bond with them, but he needed to now with whatever that creature had been. He sensed understanding from him, but from where specifically, and for what?

A voice called to him through the wisps of smoke left behind, drifting into the trees.

The castle on the hill.

Francis kept to the trees even though it was considerably harder to navigate through them, trying to stay out of sight and managing to evade being detected by anyone in town by some miracle, given he was breaking branches and shoving spindly trees out of his way enough to make the birds take notice. He happened upon the cobblestone wall soon enough and followed it around to the main road where he nervously approached the gate and touched the bell on the middle spoke. It tinkled cheerily and did not echo the mood he felt now, still apprehensive but absolutely desperate in his need for answers.

The gate swung open the second he touched the bell, exposing further the long gravel pathway up to the front of the castle where cherry trees arched their branches towards each other eagerly as long lost siblings. He took no time to sightsee as he immediately walked his way up to the cherrywood doors, finding them open to him without a touch from his mighty claws.

A tall man stood before him at ease, a soft smile on his lips as he looked up through long lashes.

"Please come in, Mr. Dolarhyde. I'm honored you decided to join me. I'll admit your eagerness surprises me, as I was unsure whether or not you would visit me right away or take your time. I am not so selfish as to think my inquiry a priority in your doubtlessly busy life."

After he took his few steps in, Francis stayed where he stood and held the door from closing with a few fingers, golden eyes narrowing. His rush to get here for answers was slightly overtaken by his protective instinct and he refused to let the doors lock behind him, feeling a bit foolish now that in his rush after having it pointed out so bluntly.

"What are you? What do you know…?" He said softly over the creaking floorboards.

Hannibal chuckled, the sound echoing unnaturally as if multiple of him were laughing at once, "I am called many things, some being Child of Cain, Nosforatu, a demon or a devil, but you may simply call me Dr. Lecter. Please don't be anxious, you'll be much more comfortable not hovering between doorways."

He smiles with his teeth, lips spread wide. "Since you are a guest, I'm afraid I must insist on our conversation taking place somewhere more comfortable. Will you join me?"

Francis supposed that faced with such a being he didn't have a choice. It was this or leave entirely it seemed, and the burning intensity of his curiosity would have nothing of submission to his gut instincts.

"Hm.this" He said, letting the door go and following Dr. Lecter down the hallway. Everything was incredibly extensive and vast, ornately furnished and smelling of polish and money. The combination of feelings created by everything residing within these cobblestone structures was something awful and he felt nauseated by everything, and he spent more energy than usual making his outward cadence perfect to make sure he looked as powerful and in control as possible.

Dr Lecter lead Francis up the west staircase where he brought him into his study, the very room in which Will Graham threw himself from the window but a few weeks before. The fireplace was lit cheerily, and Hannibal gestured for Francis to sit as he did the same across from him in an ornate armchair.

"Now, to our conversation."

Francis sniffed as he tried to fit into the chair, finding it's high back and structured armrests restricting.

"If you don't ansswer my quesstionss I don't ssee a reasson for me to sstay." He hissed, not enjoying the place or it's interior at all and incredibly unimpressed with it's demon inhabitant. The more time passed the angrier he was about leaving his pleasant bath so soon to visit someone who may not even understand.

"Happily. You asked what I am, and forgoing of a long winded explanation I'm sure you aren't entirely interested in hearing, I will tell you simply that I am an undead demon called a vampire." Hannibal picked up the pronunciation of the s sounds, slightly extended with sensitive lack of detail but obvious awareness in every utterance. It was something the dragonborn man had obviously spent some time practicing to mitigate, but had reached a point where he refused to think about it. The fact made the demon preen a little bit.

"I will answer any and all of your questions, as long as you answer mine." He said.

"Okay." Francis replied, wondering what questions a vampire could possibly ask him. He knew at this point that Dr Lecter knew what he had been doing, but to the extent of which he wasn't sure.

"You replied to my inquiry, so it's only fair I do the... I give you a reply too. Go ahead." He stopped trying to talk so fast that he ignored how he sounded, trying to regain control.

Hannibal smiles, "You have been killing families in town, haven't you Francis? As I have said, I am a great admirer and I was hoping that I might be able to discuss your work with you."

Francis allowed his tense muscles and held breath to be released slowly, running his tongue over his teeth and showing them to the Doctor with pride. He'd sharpened them earlier on a whittling stone, just a tad. When they fell out to be replaced he would keep them in a jar on his nightstand. A real, true admirer - he'd been waiting, waiting for someone like that to come along, to recognize him.

"I'm not killing anyone, i'm changing them to fit a higher role." He said, shaking his head gently. "I'm not the only killer in the village, but I'm beginning to believe my compatriot... Hass been you, Doctor Lecter. If I'm correct I'll have to admit I am an admirer of your work too." The claws on his feet dug a little into the floor, and Hannibal's lip barely twitched, lost on his conversation partner.

"How validating to have my intuition confirmed," Hannibal leaned forward in his chair, his fingers knit together over his knee. "You are elevating them to a higher worthiness... For the higher purpose of whom, Francis?"

There grew a cacophony of yelps and yips and barks outside of Will's clearing, starting low and beginning to rise in volume like the tide. One of the wolves let out a howl - it was a great and wonderful evening, for there was fresh food to be harvested. The pack circled around the headless body of a stag, 100 meters into the forest from the east of the stream.

Clumsy paws of a little pup trampled through the nearby branches and stopped suddenly in their tracks as Harley's vision was immediately focused into the branches up above her, and she didn't comprehend what she saw at first, panting up at the big scary shadow that didn't make much sense, as still as it sat.

Hanging in the trees, branches tangled into antlers, was the decapitated stag's head. It dripped crimson into the dry leaves below as the little pup watched, enraptured by the stillness of mysterious and foreboding death only projected by horrible omens. The head was completely torn from the body that laid far away in the brush that her family had gathered around. It stared with glassy black eyes down at the little pup and she began to cry softly, knowing something was very wrong.

Winston ran up behind Harley, nudging her on the back with his nose to try and get her to tear her eyes away from the sightless beast.

"We gotta get the food." He said warily, and both of the pups knew intrinsically something was off, but only little Harley said it aloud. "The head is very far up, and the body is so so far away" she said, tail tucked between her legs. "Where's big brother?"

"I don't know." Winston whined, trying again to get her to look away.

"Everything serves a higher purpose." Hannibal said as if it were a mantra, as if he knew exactly what Francis wanted to hear.

"The higher purpose serves the dragon." Francis said fervently. "The Great Red Dragon for who I am but a meager vessel." The words were nearly purred from his lips, full of worship and pride.

"If you truly accept that everyone of little value serves something higher and that we are not our own you are not the man I took you for."

The trees suddenly began to tremble and the leaves shook with them as suddenly one set of antlers slipped down some branches, stilling for a split second before falling off the tree completely, blood showering down onto the two pups as the head began to hurtle in their direction.

It was slammed out of the way by a tall human figure as Will pushed with his arms crossed in an X, red splattering all over his body as the severed neck hit him full on, landing just a few yards away from the children who pressed themselves against his legs, cowering.

"I'm here." Will said, out of breath. The stag head lay prone on the ground but he half expected it to move along with his knowledge of who had definitely put it there.

"You need to get back to the clearing." He said.

"Far from it, dear Francis. I see everything, and your Great Red Dragon is no exception as it bubbles under the surface of your scales." Hannibal felt anger that didn't belong to him suddenly spike through his veins and it took all he had not to smile in response. Will must have found his gift, and just as Hannibal had hoped the druid knew exactly who had left it for him.

It took a moment to refocus. "You are not a mere vessel, for the Dragon shines through you with each person you change. Their very breath brings you to glory... Fueling your radiance even as those who wish to snuff you out linger in the aftermath."

"Our, fueling our radiance." Francis breathed, elated to be indulged like this. "The Dragon is a blessed memory, he is enormously significant and should stay in the minds of the inferior where he belongs. I have been setting my sights on who shall serve the dragon next, and I can feel how close I am to bringing them to their knees."

The pups whimpered, Harley looking up at Will with frightened eyes and her tail between her legs, "Why was it up there? What happened to it?" Winston nudged her back towards the clearing as the oldest wolves began to drag the stag's body alongside them.

"There's a monster in the woods." Will said, his voice low in warning. "I don't want you two leaving the clearing anymore, especially when no one is specifically looking after you."

"But I'm almost a grown up, I can take care of myself!" Protested Winston.

"Not against this you can't." Will barked sternly, startling Harley and making her cries grow slightly more fervent. They weren't used to seeing him angry, and he was furious here. It was a sight.

A prickling tickle moved up Hannibal's spine and he crossed his legs as the heat of Will's rage flickered distantly at the edge of his mind. His creeping vines were growing thorns and digging down deep, sending sharp pain into Hannibal's skull. Before he reached too far to be able to comfortably retreat quickly Hannibal pulled his attention back to the manor once again.

"They are hunting for you, Mr. Dolarhyde. There are men seeking you out to put an end to this becoming... How will you greet them?"

"On the night of the full moon I possess the might to fight a dozen men or more, and on that day I am prepared to step into the sun so we may be acknowledged." Francis said slowly as he felt a thrill go down his spine. "They will be met with hellfire and added to the list of sacrifices we deserve."

"Yes, the full moon." Hannibal murmured, his upper lip pulling over the top row of his teeth in a grimacing twitch of muscle. "I would assume that is a night you would not want to be overshadowed, especially as powerful as you are and what you are owed."

"No event would be able to overshadow a full family's becoming, and we will not be 'overshadowed' by something so trivial. Those who wish to end our journey are but a roadblock along the way... But how do you know who wants to stop me?"

"I have heard whispers around the town that people are not afraid of you. They may not be able to stop you completely, but that could certainly hinder progress." Hannibal's shadow angled over the dragonborn as he whispered this like a secret just for two children sequestered away in their corner where no one could see and no one wanted to understand.

"One family in particular thinks of themselves too strong for you to handle, too good for you to bring down. They view your accomplishments with apathy."

"What a perfect example of the thing the Dragon demands." Francis said, clearly elated. "Where? Tell me where, and I will see it done. You have done so much for us tonight, I thank you for your recognition in the dragon's service." The air was alight with their energies, every movement short and bright with power.

"There is a clearing not far from town an hour's walk to the south of the property and east into the trees at the fork in the road. You will hear and smell dogs - they're druids." Hannibal's eyes shifted toward the window when he felt the familiar ping on the edge of his property made of a body alight with untapped fury.

"Yes." Francis murmured, immediately standing up and already feeling the adrenaline in his veins. He needed to see them, he needed to mark the forest and make his plan, begin unwrapping the gift that this demon had given to him.

Hannibal smiled, leading Francis out of the back servant's exit. As he watched him leave after a swift goodbye, he could tell the seed he had planted into the creature's mind had already begun to sprout. Such a trusting boy Francis Dolarhyde was, he thought, the crow's foot wrinkles by his eyes deepening with amusement.

Through the forefront of his mind Hannibal could also feel Will's anger as he swiftly moved closer, pulsing green and blue energies whispering their threats. He hummed at the thought of that fury directed at the power of The Great Red Dragon and the result of the clashing of two beasts and their becomings creating a wonderous sight.

Will was seeing red, the ever-aching, burning bright fury in the back of his mind affecting everything he saw so thoroughly that he would have cried for the relief of feeling something else, from taking Hannibal's skull and dragging it along the pavement to pressing his thumbs into both eye sockets. Everything would have to be done with his bare hands, his full body pressing and pulling the disgusting man apart just like he'd done to Will's mind.

The door swung open by itself as he approached, and when he stepped in he could feel Hannibal in the darkness of the hall.

"It's late, Will."

The voice echoed in the foyer as it did through Will's nightmares, smirk audible in the languid tones of his voice. "What seems to be troubling you?"

"No, Hannibal. We're not doing that tonight." Will said, and his anxiety was taken over by the thrill of panic so great that it surpassed any real feeling of fear and made him feel truly alive. His voice stayed a low murmur, but was also firm. He relaxed his body and stared straight to the front, refusing to search Hannibal out.

"You've been ruining my dreams with your selfish, tasteless acts for too long. I'm done playing your captive on whims unknown, I've given you a chance to have an equal partnership, I *trusted* you with *EVERYTHING* I had and you disappointed me." Every extra inflection was simply met with more breath. He would not scream, he would simply ride on the wave of his anger and pain like a bird on the tide.

"Show yourself."

"Tasteless is an interesting choice." Cool breath tickled the shell of Will's ear as he felt Hannibal's body slip from the dark and manifest behind him, chest pressed to Will's back like a wall between Will and the door. "You seemed to find them rather tasty from what I recall. Regardless - I have kept all of your secrets as I said I would and in return I have shown you all of me, just as you asked."

Will twitched when he felt Hannibal's body settle further into his back, putting all of his energy into staying still, into staring ahead, into refusing to give anything away. His nostrils filled with an aged scent, understated and familiarly sweet. It wasn't Hannibal's blood, it was just the smell of him without barriers or magical temptations, almost vulnerable.

"Tell me Will, when did you find me disappointing? Was it when I gave you exactly what you wanted and showed you exactly what you were and are missing?" The taller man's cheek brushed Will's temple affectionately, nose pressed into damp curls as he leaned over his shoulder.

"I told you and I showed you the fragmented parts of myself that I've kept hidden from everyone else," Will growled. "But if for some reason doing so had shown any risk of harm on your part, I would have warned you - and I'm not sure if it's your self importance or your love of death itself that convinced you to create something inside of me anew, but it's not mine, I'm not wrathful, and I certainly don't play god."

(An outsider would have assumed he was pleading with himself.)

"I won't be the version of me that you have made, Hannibal." He said, his fingers moving just slightly, unknowing of what they really and truly craved. Was it red from the spilled blood of final death, or red from his mouth, transferred to the lips of a lover?

Hannibal shook his head and tsked gently with his tongue, faintly disappointed. "Now you and I both know that is not entirely the truth, don't we?" His hands landed on Will's shoulders as the shadows in his mind coaxed forward familiar flashes of a great dire wolf tearing away at a murderer's jaw, accompanied by the spikes of power felt in justice.

He moved around the shorter man so that he could look into his eyes. "I have not created you and that is not what I am prideful of. What I find happiness in is the fact that you have accomplished so much and all I did was show you who you truly are."

Hannibal's face was beyond pleased, almost euphoric in joy, and Will hated to see it, hated to hear the words that poured from his lips and fell into Will's hands and forced him to see what he'd been avoiding - ending the murderer's life had been a rush it had been freeing and felt right, to rid the world of something that did not deserve to be there, to show wrath and not mercy for a being that had no desire to repent, to judge the sinner who played the part of an innocent man - and if Will wasn't to play any sort of god, who was? The justice system they had in place in the village, the courts, the sheriffs, the men who could be paid off to look the other way? He nearly released a hoarse laugh but instead he trembled, ignorant to the news that Hannibal had been indeed watching him this whole time in order to focus on one thing at a time, one thing in this moment. He didn't want to turn his attention to Hannibal's eyes, he didn't want to be any closer to so much information.

"How did it feel to make the final choice for the man who ended an innocent life?" Hannibal asked.

The investigator's mouth hung open for a moment, hesitating too long for his mind to justify. "It felt..." He said, head shaking softly as if to warn himself away from this, but was there a use for lying at this point? Did it serve a function?

"It felt good."

"Killing must feel good to God too, he does it all the time, and are we not created in his image?" The words were spoken gently against Will's brow, lips brushing across each hair. He was open and vulnerable and the demon in front of him drank from his anxiety like wine.

"What were you thinking just before you crossed my threshold?" He asked, raising a hand to stroke the side of Will's face softly, his thumb making circles on one cheek before dipping

lower to gently move over the plush of pink lips. He breathed with long useless muscle memory that remained well practiced in his insistence to retain the habit.

"I wanted to destroy you." Said Will under his breath, each exhale mixing with Hannibal's in the limited air that flowed between them. He brought up one hand to wrap his fingers tenderly around the cool skin of the taller man's throat, leaving them to make a slight pressure on wiry muscle. His voice was but a whisper on the wave of anger he kept at tide.

"I wanted to see you cut away and undone like you have pulled me apart, like you have torn the loose strings from my seams so that I may fall away just to be sewn into your skin."

There was an electric spark that flashed with the exhilarating heat of desire as Hannibal's lips twitched into a lustful snarl and he growled deep in his throat, voice low and purely animalistic. "Then undo me."

There was a snapping of chains within Hannibal as he grabbed Will and shoved him hard against the closed door, the hands around his throat finally forcing the monster underneath his ribs free as Hannibal's lips and tongue slipped hotly over Will's, finally taking what he had claimed for himself the second Will stepped foot on his grounds.

Will's breath escaped him as he was slammed hard into the doors, and he gasped sharply to pull it back in - but it was suddenly all Hannibal, suffocating him with desire. The inhale only served to draw in more of the tantalizing smell and taste the man carried with him and his fingers tightened around cool stone as Will moved his traitorous lips against Hannibal's like a dance, the partnership perfect, well practiced, and violent.

"I don't want to undo you" he hissed, familiarity to his anger creating a virile fondness for it.

"I want to *CUT* you, Hannibal."

He drew the silver knife from his sleeve and ran it quickly, expertly through the air to slice at Hannibal's stomach, biting at his tongue like Eve did the apple of Eden.

A deep and powerful groan bubbled up in Hannibal's throat and vibrated against Will's mouth as he caught the offending arm and slammed it against the door, sneering as he pulled away to tut his tongue against his teeth, "Oh Will... I see you wanted to surprise me."

The blade was still gripped firmly in his hand as Hannibal wrapped his fingers around Will's and tightened slowly, achingly consistent as they crushed his digits until they snapped. The tool dropped to the floor when it was released and the clattering sound was unheard, as was the man's scream, silenced.

The deep rumbling growl in Hannibal's chest peaked to a snarl as he gripped Will's hair and wrenched his neck to the side firmly so six furious points of Hannibal's fangs could clamp shut onto Will's throat like a bear trap.

Will was startled so thoroughly by the pain in his hand as it broke that he felt almost nothing from the sensation of the bite to his neck, effortlessly taken from him and nearly knocking

him out as all of the blood in his jugular vein rushed into the strong suction of Hannibal's mouth.

His own mouth was opened to scream, knowing that an injury so life-threatening would take him with blindingly horrible pain after the shock of impact, but as he waited through agonizing seconds instead of hitting him like a charging bull the agony settled gently into his veins along with a building, haunting feeling of something right, warm and familiar.

What did eventually hit him after a taunting handful of seconds, what slammed into him with it's full weight and made his eyes roll back in his head was an all-enveloping, blinding pleasure.

It was like the heart-pumping and agonizing buildup of what was felt right before climax, but it didn't go away, suspended in his body like a slow-acting poison. The demon ground their hips together and Will, previously silent with his breath caught in his throat, was permitted by his vocal cords to release a traitorously surprised cry of confused ecstasy, trying to move but facing complete failure on all accounts.

Hannibal was alight with sensation, the taste sending hot shivers through his entire body with sparks and static prickling all over his limbs. He drank deeply and his head was instantly filled with Will's memories that came flooding to him with the taste of pine and autumn. Crisp clear streams rushed into Hannibal's ears alongside Will's breathless moans and gasps, feeling him begin to drown in that current. The man was held in a grip impossible to struggle against, not that it took much effort to sustain.

He was released quickly and everything was gone, no pain or pleasure, like a fog on Will's body that went lax in the grip of this monster. The druid could barely comprehend the situation before his eyes squeezed shut.

"Uh-- hhgk-" Was all he could manage, moving through the molasses in the air. "Huh- Hannibal--"

"You will have to try much harder to hurt me than that, and while I could suggest convincing me to hold my party on the Full Moon to slight the Great Red Dragon, that idea is so ridiculous that I may forgo it for a better one." Hannibal hissed.

He was silent as the warmth of Will's blood flooded his own veins, his hunger aching and tugging with the pulsing of Will's wound that gushed down his neck. He was losing a lot outside of what Hannibal took from him, and the demon didn't mind pulling back and watching the great spectacle that he wanted burned into his mind forever.

Will's memories flashed again in Hannibal's sight as he listened and watched and felt certain sensations come through the broken gate of his mind. He saw a little boy studying druidic tomes with a few dogs by his side, coaching him gently to turn his hands into paws. He saw himself helping a tiny white-blonde puppy to be born. He saw a little girl holding his hand next to a field of daisies.

"For the romance of it... Is that not what you said when you lied to me, Will?" His voice was harsh, edging on anger that chilled and numbed Will's limbs in addition to the injuries he

sustained. He took the weaker man's face, tilting his chin upwards and gripping his chin firmly.

"Quite naughty, darling, creating conspiracies to destroy me."

As he said it he felt a deep tugging in his chest, his heart turning to iron as it began to sink - there sat a mixture of pride, anger and hurt taken in an iron fist and shoved through his gullet. Will had promised to keep his secrets and turned right around to run off and plot his demise without a second thought, it seemed. He swallowed as his face twisted, chin and lower lip quivering for a split second before it hardened with it's hurt, and anger melded with his grief.

Will could barely do anything. His mouth could not form words, his knees were weak as he lost all feeling, nerve endings alive but with something unidentifiable, horrible and wonderful. It was like a gentle death that came from horrible violence, and he thought fleetingly that it was peaceful.

His shaking unbroken hand raised in front of his face and placed itself gently on Hannibal's chest over his heart, and the last thought he had before he lost his vision and sense of self was the wonder of feeling the man's heartbeat for a second time.

Hannibal huffed out a noise that registered somewhere between a laugh and a sob.

"Even as my heart breaks it beats for only you, my love."

Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
Major blood loss, injuries leading to death, dead and mutilated animals, and a kiss that is more taken than invited, but stays for tea anyway.

Thanks for reading - this is the longest chapter to date so it took a little longer than normal, my apologies! Feel free to hop onto KingHimBoJones or Princewellmatt on Twitter if you need us for anything at all. ;)

In Which Harley Cannot Be A Hero

Chapter Summary

> The staircase to hell sometimes goes up. That's when you know you're working for your own punishments.
>
> Trigger warnings at the end.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was greeted upon waking by the cheerful brightness of the rising sun on his face, not fully registering what was happening. He felt a bleary echo of pain and pleasure unmatched by any identifiable experience, and he remembered seeing red at some point, but he was also still bone-achingly tired, weariness settling into every muscle he could sense. He shifted in the soft grass of the land by the stream, pushing his messy curls out of his face and stretching, his body feeling relaxed and so very nice in the humid beginnings of a fresh day. He grumbled lazily, debating sitting up but deciding against it as his body pulled him back into sleep.

The next days were odd for his family. They knew where Will was, but could not wake him. They poked and prodded but he would not open his eyes - he seemed dead in his slumber, and the dogs began to take shifts in protecting him, curling in by his side, head on his chest. Winston didn't take shifts because he refused to leave at *all*, and the pup was so stubborn that they worked around him, often leaving the man attended by two druids but truly inconveniencing no one.

Francis made his marks in the trees over the next few days, making silent movements in the forest during all hours of morning, noon and night. Hannibal had given him excellent information; the family was huge but vulnerable, and Will was the least intimidating of them all. He was almost pretty, sleeping in the guise of a portrait, marred skin over the entire side of his neck doing nothing to subdue his boyish features that were growing steadily more furry as he grew hair over his cheeks and chin. Francis ached to see the dragon in his eyes.

But not yet. Patience would be rewarded.

You can't stay here forever, darling.

When Will woke up he was horribly cold for a split second, settling into his skin only after a long moment of waiting. It was warmer after the minute it took to realise he was alive, and he sat up slowly, waking Winston who was on his stomach and one of the wolves, Ellie, who was over his legs. Winston's rear end immediately went ballistic, looking as if his tail was about to fall off as it slapped Ellie's body violently.

"Hello pup." Ellie said gently, and took his hand on her silver furred back very well as he stood, allowing Winston to pepper kisses all over his knees and hands. "You've been asleep for days."

"Asleep.... *Days*?" Will said, but it wasn't incredulous, it was an innocent confusion, and it reminded Ellie of when he was barely able to stay in his human form without crying.

"Yes. We've been giving you water periodically, but you must be starving and shaky. No moving too fast, pup."

"Ellie, I died." Will said, bringing a hand to his neck and watching it as it came away, mystified that it was clean. There was no red. No pain. No nothing. He was so, so cold, but something in his core was bright red hot.

This something grew to size quickly once it was discovered, manifesting in a bubble of laughter that started at the back of his throat, rumbling it's way through his chest as tears quickly sprang to his eyes, pouring over cheeks that flushed with mirth as peals of laughter continued to tear through him, only for a moment, incredulous and disbelieving.

Oh, Hannibal, what a gift! What a gift this was, what a grand, stupendous, WONDEROUS gift he had been given!

He looked at Ellie, who appeared concerned, but Winston looked to be just as happy as Will was.

"What happened?" The elder asked simply, not sure how to approach anything of this sort.

"You're right." Will said, something sinister behind his grin. "You're completely right. I am very, very hungry."

He took it upon himself to take Winston and Harley hunting that day by on their own, following explicit permission by Buster, who seemed unimpressed by his newfound interest in the activity. He tried not to go too fast or station his body too hard, but after such a long rest it felt like a new body. Will had never particularly enjoyed hunting before and had spent many a day simply buying and bringing pork buns and other human treats to his pack, but after being asleep for so long he was filled with an unmatched energy. He *needed* to hunt now, desire mixing and molding into his instincts as his anger morphed into clarity of life. Hannibal had allowed him to live, and in that Will finally recognized his willingness to go on within one reason, and one reason alone, a goal finite in it's path but with unlimited potential. A reason he was still alive that involved Hannibal, who had shown him who he was - and who he was had turned out to be something only the two of them could see. Will had always known somewhere deep within himself, But Hannibal had shown him, truly.

He was a prosecutor. He was a challenger to the wicked and had the power to be a God, if he truly could take on the mindset of one. It was foolish to think that he couldn't be, with his powerset and the drive he carried with him. Hannibal had opened his eyes but he'd done nothing to further his talents, instead directing them towards the man who had killed the Butcher, and l the rabbit that had come in his way. However his true purpose, his reason for progress and his finite end goal were to *find a way to kill Hannibal Lecter.*

He would be the one to rid the world of its massive stain, because he was the only one who had a chance. Hannibal had no weaknesses but Will. It was obvious. Will had gone about it all wrong - if he played into his hands, he would *have* the hands displayed on a wall. He could conquer easily if he was simply himself, and the good doctor had never let him believe anything else. All he had to do was convince the monster that he was worth another chance in order to get close once again, and then finally figure out when and how and drive the stake into his heart, because he would be allowed to try and many times as he wanted until he did it right.

Hannibal had been telling him this, showing him all along. He could save everyone like this, save the townspeople from any further turmoil and give them answers, and it had been the vampire himself that had shown him how.

He used the aggression he had been feeling differently now towards the rabbits and other small animals in the woods with the two pups. He shaped himself into his canine form for the hunt, releasing tension from his earlier guilt to slam into prey, allowing himself to pant and bark and pounce, lay traps and follow Harley's lead when she found a particularly irritating butterfly. She and Winston were thrilled with his newfound energy, neither of them considering why or how, simply happy that he was there with them and willing to hunt.

The little group successfully gathered five critters (and a butterfly) to bring back in their mouths, spotted in mud and blood, panting heavily and only suffering a bruised paw, a limping Winston having accidentally stepped directly into a spiky bush. It hadn't been long for them, but it was a tad bit more time-consuming than the usual hunters allowed it to take given their level of expertise.

Buster, bipedal and human at the moment for some reason or another in the form of a balding man in his late fifties wearing a ratty overcoat, waved them in and fetched a knife from one of the piles of things they had stored intermittently through their clearing, waving it around.

"I'm gonna skin 'em." He said excitedly. "Been practicing my dexterousness."

Winston immediately did the same, springing naked into his own human form. "I want to be dexterousness." He said, sounding very intelligent.

Harley made a yelping little bark of frustration. "I'm tired! I can't stand up on two legs! I want to do that!" She said angrily. Will set his prey down on the ground and walked over to her, licking at a spot on her back to clean her little body, making her wiggle and growl at him, play-biting his tongue. He pretended to be offended by such an action and rolled over onto his back, giving a soft "oof" when she wiggled onto his chest, her happy breaths coming out in whistling glee. She had expended her magical energy but her physical energy was routinely boundless.

Ellie made a warning woof, her bigger form making her much more intimidating than Will, and Harley pretended like she hadn't heard, but the action devolved from there. Winston and Buster did terrible jobs of skinning their prey, and they ended up simply chewing away at bits and pieces of it until a few other dogs managed to bring down a doe and her fawn, and that satisfied everyone mostly. Will shifted back to his human form in order to pick a large bucket of raspberries with his fingers, sweet and juicy enough to mix with the bloodstains on dirty coats.

The day was wrapping up quite well, and Will was once again where he belonged, in his pack and curled up against warm, furry bodies both big and small. The next day was the day he'd promised to visit his monster right before his party, but the night was young and he was full and had his arms full of fluff - there was no reason to rush it by sleeping it away, he thought. Instead he took time to catalogue everyone present, counting every body and making sure to see if they were breathing easily. He searched their minds with gentle passes, which he had

been neglecting to do lately in present company, but in doing so he made what could arguably be called both a mistake and a devastatingly fortunate discovery.

There was one extra body in the clearing, and it belonged to a mind he had never met.

Immediately he prodded inside the mind, finding it unguarded and open like a swinging door with loose hinges, but even upon reading through it like a book it was almost unintelligible - two screaming voices crying out in victory and in triumph, pride in a job well done.

Will rose to his feet very suddenly, letting his family huff their annoyances up at him.

"'sa matter?" Harley asked sleepily.

"We're not alone." Will said, cursing his eyes for not being as useful as they could be in the dark, knowing another Wild Shape would take an almost impossible amount of effort after he'd already used one earlier to hunt and a foolishly wasteful one to run a long distance, expending most of his druidic energy in doing so.

The trees shifted, leaves parting just slightly. Will read panic in the air. He had woken most of the pack by now, but many of them were bewildered and sleepy. If he'd known what was about to happen, he would have shouted and pushed them all awake, but instead he just nudged Ellie, who sat up with a snort and began to sniff the air, eventually standing to follow her nose into the trees, growling slightly.

"It smells like burning oil and fancy soap." She said before disappearing into the treeline, and Will made to follow her before he heard a sharp yelp and a thud, and then another yelp, this time loud and panicked and pained, longer than the one before.

"Ellie!" Will yelled, and he cursed himself for letting her go too far alone, there were bears in the forest as well as large, dangerous bugs - he began to run towards where she'd disappeared before thinking better of it, instead choosing to train his ears on the ground and listen intently. Most of the pack was on their feet now and sniffing cautiously, making a few barks of warning, a few of them shifting into more aggressive shapes as they huddled together closely. This, they supposed, was their mistake - as fire burned where flammable materials were dense, and this was a large group covered in fur.

It came from what felt like all sides, and Will dropped to the ground immediately, hitting the grass on his stomach with a panicked sound, suddenly surrounded by heat and the scent of burning hair. Several druids shrieked in pain, trying to shake off the flames, but a few of them weren't so lucky. He felt guilt wash over him because of his size, shielded from immediate damage by bodies of larger frame. Harley and Winston were gone, and he felt their absence like boiling acid in his stomach.

"You give me no choisce!" Said a loud, deep voice with a strong hiss to his consonants, and a Dragonborn stepped out of the treeline with a roar, tearing down a small tree next to him with his tail and inhaling sharply before drowning them again in fire, and Will kept his head down as a few of the druids shifted into bears, looking larger and more formidable, and it obviously gave the dragon a surprise - he'd known they were druids, but had obviously not realised that Wild Shape was fluid.

The fight that followed was horrible. Will tried desperately to contribute, throwing a knife that bounced off the harsh armor of red scales and a failed hold spell that was brushed off effortlessly, but he was powerless against a beast of this size, especially spitting fire from all angles. He attempted to use his own Wild Shape but that also turned out to be a fruitless endeavor, making his eyes water with frustration as he pushed and panted at his traitorous body to work.

This was all wrong. It must be the Great Red Dragon here before him now, but why was today the day he struck? How had he thought to select Will's pack as his family? What reason did he have to be here now, deep in the woods, with a throat full of fire and nothing to say? Will choked down a poisonous thought full of regret that he had done so much research on Hannibal and what *he* could be while completely blindsiding himself to something that was an immediate threat to more than himself...

The air was filled with the screaming of different animals, shouting from Buster and Winston trying to avoid the flames and cast spells that would carefully avoid hitting the wrong creatures, and over it all Will could hear his own heartbeat as he continued to exist in the clearing uselessly, powerless to stop anything. The worst part came when he heard one specific noise, one tiny yelp that was quieter than anyone else's, but so small that it was significant.

It didn't last long enough. Will found himself wishing that he could have heard the voice as long as Hannibal heard Mischa's, as it could be seen as a privilege, but instead a small cry was all he got.

Lit by the fire surrounding him, the dragon managed to grab a little white-blonde puppy with one clawed hand, shaking her like a ragdoll. He used his mouth to rip off a leg, a fluffy tail, and then threw the child to the ground - unnecessary, as she had probably broken her neck being swung about. It was too fast. Harley died too fast, and Will was selfish for thinking it.

He and Winston's cries were both wordless chords of agony, tearing through the both of them like knives and the night like a sword. How had she gotten over there? Who had let her approach the front lines? The Dragonborn was soon overwhelmed soon by the sheer volume of the pack's grief for their youngest, and it blew a bigger gust of searing fire into the night, backing up and setting the entire clearing ablaze, grass and bushes and trees and little mounds of supplies catching, smoke blinding everyone and interrupting their breaths. It used the heat to get away, to disappear, and Will was running after it - the thing was wounded, he could see it's leg, it was bleeding and maybe he could finally *do something*- but a bear held him back, calling for him.

"The fire." It said, and Will shook his head as he stopped running, unable to even conjure tears, breaths exciting him as moans, scratchy and helpless and broken. They were right. There was nothing he could do, and he had done nothing.

The fire couldn't be extinguished. No items could be saved - the family simply had to leave and let it burn. Harley's little broken body was already gone. Ellie hadn't been found from the very beginning. The fight had lasted but minutes, but a blip in anyone's timeline, and they were gone from this life like a match dropped into a lake.

There was a strange sense in the back of Hannibal's consciousness that scratched little paws at the crack of the locked door to his mind. It was an urgency that begged like a mutt to be let back in to what he kept hidden away, and he chose to ignore it, focusing instead on overseeing flower arrangements himself and choosing his particular blooms, soft blue bachelor's buttons, bright red and orange crocosmias, and purple asters. Oftentimes he would stumble upon the mind of someone in particular distress and feel their emotions like a breeze that would always pass, but now it was familiar, particular and incessant.

Hannibal withdrew from his vases and moved through his castle, the walls seeming bit cool and withdrawn, lacking a certain warmth that it's owner and master had become accustomed to. Even with the castle well lit and well traveled with the feet of human men and women it obviously lacked the glow of the owner's affection that helped it bloom the way it only did with one particular man inside of it.

Up the west staircase from the foyer, Hannibal moved smoothly down the corridor to doors decorated with ornately hand-carved twin stag antlers. He pushed open the entrance to his chambers and stepped across the dark hardwood before stopping at his desk. He rested a hand on the wood and grit his teeth, his jaw flexing before he cocked his fist back suddenly, sending it forward too fast for a human eye and creating a huge cracking bang as the doctor's demeanor cracked apart with the furniture, his fist crushing and destroying the desk below him, sending shards of heavy wood around the room as he withdrew his arm.

Curse him. Curse him and his vitality and his refusal to treat Hannibal like anyone else. *Curse* him for his refusal to *be* like anyone else.

He turned on his heel and waved his hand toward the pile of torn wood that was once his desk and sent it up in contained flames, a circling and controlled inferno burning as hotly as the rage that coiled within him.

Flinging open the French doors to the balcony with a gust of wind he looked over his grounds, strong hands gripping the stone so hard it cracked as if it were delicate micah. The desk burned behind him as something caught his eye in the distance, down the hills and in the forest just outside of town.

There was a forest fire raging independently in what looked like an area a few miles out, and Hannibal's eyes widened as his rage slowly faded. He thought briefly back to the sense of urgency scratching at the crack of the door into his mind, a whimpering and helpless pup begging for entry. His focus slid upward with the smoke that billowed into the sky, blocking the light of the moon.

The Dragon had found the clearing and began his work a day early, he mused. Will's change would be just a bit sooner than Hannibal expected, and he wasn't sure what he thought of that yet, but he refused to reach out and refused to see. If no one but strangers visited his party tomorrow, he would know who had emerged victorious. This would be an exercise in patience.

Will didn't sleep for the full amount of time it took to find a safe area for his family, and they found that at the base of a large Sequoia tree to the West of their clearing, far past the fires

and the stream, surrounded by wildlife they found foreign but familiar. It was farther off from town and more secluded, and the older druids used what was left of their magic reserves to conjure vines in a large fence, setting up watch cycles and sitting vigilant next to each other, licking wounds and healing what they could in short, weak spurts. Winston cried into Will's lap all night, the child filled with confusion and grief that Will echoed down to his bones, their minds connected with shared trauma and Will's wildly searching mind, desperate to find any threats again if they were to return. Nothing happened out of the ordinary for the rest of the night, but he still did not rest.

Had the Great Red Dragon been planning to attack him that night, he wondered? Or had he been found out a night too early thanks to Will's security check? There had only been attacks on nights if the full moon, so were they different or was it simply a plan interrupted? If that were the case, what would have happened if they had fought the dragon at it's true power - would they have survived?

Would he have survived, Will corrected, because not everyone had made it. His little Harley, always so protective of the little butterflies she could safely protect against, was lost. Her spirit was probably still in the forest, wondering why her family had left. Wondering why Will had let her get into the middle of such a dangerous fight, why he hadn't protected her... Why he hadn't been able to protect anyone.

Will had been totally and utterly useless in the heat of the moment. He hadn't been powerful or useful to anyone, he'd needed to be protected and sheltered once again because of the limitations of his magic, because of something he'd always struggled with and had never been strong enough to overcome. It felt like lead in his bloodstream and steel in his feet. He wanted to sink six feet under and be left to drown in his ineptitudes.

How could he think for a second that he would be the one to clear a vampire off this earth when given a trial, a chance to protect the very dearest thing to him, he completely failed? When his limit was but an inch off the ground, How could he fly to reach the realm of power that Hannibal could fight with? The answer to his question was right in front of him somewhere, grasping at his clothes and trying to pull him in, but it still managed to evade his line of sight.

(He needed Hannibal to show him his true potential, like he had started to, like he had just begun to tell him. He needed to be read to from the book of his becoming, and Hannibal was the only one who could understand the language that Will needed to speak.)

It took a fair bit of convincing Buster that he needed it, but the sleep spell cast on him was purely mechanical, and he sunk into it for five hours without dreams, nightmares or his usual sweats. The rest was unnatural and he usually hated to be coerced into it, but he wanted some of his energy back, some of his magic, at least enough for his Wild Shape.

"I'm going to a… A party tomorrow," he'd told the older druid, who had his leg in a splint, his usual cranky yet good-humored nature dull and lifeless. The fellow had shaken his head with a scowl.

He dressed himself in the only outfit he had, the green dulled with bloodstains, and asked one of the female druids to try and clean him up, perform a beauty spell on him to get him to look

presentable, and what she mustered up was enough to make him look clean, but the red of the blood in his clothes took over the pigment of the original. He fingered the fabric as she looked at him and he didn't say anything but a small thanks, and she sniffed at him, her spotted brown coat shifting in the wind as it picked up around the Sequoia. He brushed his hair with a pinecone clumsily and pulled it backwards out of his face.

"Have fun at your party." Winston said, his little voice rough from crying all night. "Are you sure I can't come with?"

Will kissed his head, then his nose and both his ears. The druid had struggled to get back to his wild shape and looked a bit half in and out, but his big brown eyes were always the same, trusting and loving, but now just a little more hardened to the world around the short fur covering most of his limbs and face.

"I'm sure. I have to do this on my own." He said, standing.

It was two hours now to the castle on the hill, but much of the path was newly lined with people dressed in gold and silk and purple chiffon, chattering about benign things and discussing matters that were unimportant to anything and everyone including themselves, but it was what you talked about at a party. Will found himself despising all of them, although he knew no one's stories. He really wasn't interested to hear any, not of the blind soapmaker from the west corner of the village or of the two women that supported each other up the path, their hands held steadfast between them as they navigated the dirt and rocks.

When he arrived it wasn't at a particular time that he'd promised to come, he had simply shown up and it was a miracle he'd made himself present at all. The whole estate was open and lit with fantastic yellow light, sparkling across the ornately decorated foundations and sculptures that laid into the foundation of Hannibal's large lawn. No longer were the trees dead and cracking apart under the strain of dry branches, but tied to posts and restructured to themselves, and there were no plants bowed over the cobblestoned path up to the two red, ornate and shining cherrywood doors. It was unrecognizable as it was so full of life, and Will wondered why he'd ever thought Hannibal to be a tasteless hermit or a recluse when he was clearly the opposite.

"Champagne?" Offered a stately man in uniform, holding out a platter with small sips of the stuff on it, etched silver on the serving tray that was so show-and-tell that made Will sneer.

"No, thank you." He rejected, and stayed near the edge of the property to watch and to listen. He'd come at the peak of activity and it was fascinating to see every patron laugh and tease with their friends, completely clueless to who they enjoyed the company of.

Unfortunately he was the one taken clueless but a moment later as he was approached by a pretty young woman, her black hair lightly curled and partially pulled back. Among the other ladies in their fine gowns and dresses, she wore a beige bodice and ruffled jacket with trousers and riding boots. Violet eyes looked at him as though he was a painting to be studied before a hand was offered to him.

"Will Graham."

Chapter End Notes

Character death and discussion of graphic murder of said character is in this one, kids. I didn't like writing it either. :(We made each other sad for this one.

Thanks for waiting for updates, those of you who are reading along 💕

In Which Love Is A Twisted And Cruel Thing

Chapter Summary

> This relationship is perfectly healthy. Not problematic at all. No sir
>
> Enjoy our chappie ❤️
>
> (Edit: We are on a small hiatus as we have been going through a lot of big life changes but there WILL be more chapters soon! Thank you so much for being here and reading and coming back for more chapters! We will be back with Chapter 15 soon!)

Chiyoh's voice was soft, the question more sincere than she meant it to be. It *was* incredibly odd, everything about tonight was bizarre. Hannibal was showing his face to the public after decades alone, he had been force-turning Will Graham without his knowledge, using him to clear the castle of lingering spirits - and now here he stood, the man that *exorcised* her Mischa, all vulnerable flesh and bone, considerably stronger-looking than she had assumed him to be. Her jaw tightened slightly as she swallowed.

She hadn't the faintest idea as to why she approached him and she silently cursed herself for doing so. What was the purpose? To confront him, to force him to apologise, to kill him before Hannibal had a chance? Not here and now, not when it was Hannibal's big night of moonlit narcissism. He would be considerably displeased if his progress was hindered and she wouldn't dare, no matter how much she wanted to ruffle his feathers.

Perhaps she wanted to warn Graham subconsciously, speak to him and beg him to run, before...

That train of thought came to a halt. Before was the *problem*. There wasn't a "before" anymore. Will had come back again after everything that had happened. It was too late now to affect anything. The realization sunk into Chiyoh slowly, swallowed up by dark waves within her.

"It is an odd evening, isn't it?" She said after standing next to him for a long moment.

Will blinked, his mouth dropping open silently as he stared. He bowed belatedly, remembering his manners in his confusion over being recognized.

"Yes, I suppose it is odd." He responded shortly.

"It is also odd that you chose to step back on this property at all, Mr. Graham." Her tone wasn't unkind, and she kept it serious and calm.

"Oh." Will said, looking like his breath had been knocked out of him. "You live here too?"

"In a way." She replied. "I am a part of the forest and the land, and we live through each other. My name is Chiyoh."

"You're like him, then." Will said, and it was unnecessary that he extrapolate. "Look, I'm not sure what you know about me Chiyoh, but I don't need to explain to you why I came back."

Chiyoh's brows twitched with a slight annoyance.

"I know plenty, so you are right. You don't need to explain to me why you came back, it's obvious to us both."

Their conversation looked passive and polite to any outsiders looking in, but Chiyoh was already feeling uncomfortable. "We both know that you are more like him than I could ever possibly be."

(A hundred meters away, a warm and charismatic voice belonging to a man laden in a fitted black tailcoat halted imperceptibly as his attention drifted elsewhere, taking in the bright white-blue beacon floating up into the sky above the treeline. It was mottled just slightly by the addition of a violet and indigo cloud.)

"What I do know with absolute certainty, Mr. Graham, is that I don't *have* to have intimate knowledge of your inner workings to warn you that you are in grave danger."

Will would have rolled his eyes if he was a braver man, looking away from Chiyoh and back into the sky.

"Nope, you don't know anything about why I'm back either, ma'am." He said evenly, giving her a curt smile he delivered with a considerable dose of venom.

"Chiyoh." She corrected, voice still soft. She held the leveled coolness and sharpness of a steel blade. "What did Lady Murasaki say to you the first time you came here - leave and never come back? You are not special in that. She says that to everyone for good reason."

If he had bade Lady Murasaki, she thought to herself, Mischa would also still be here with her. He would have kept running too far to take her sister from her.

"Many things have changed since Lady Murasaki told me anything." Will said.

"You should tread lightly on this ground. It will fall out from under you and swallow you whole."

"Did you have anything to say to me other than poetic warnings to stay away? I've been told I'm a brilliant conversationalist."

What an obtuse man Hannibal chose for himself, she thought. They were bloody perfect for each other, and she already felt a deep sinking in her chest as she felt the creeping dread of possible cruelties the two of them would be capable of unless she put a stop to it.

"Please, I will ask questions more genuinely and I will refrain from making my assumptions known, if you would offer me a fresh slate." She tried, her head tilting forward.

He sighed, gesturing silently with one hand.

She took the opportunity gratefully. "Why did you come back? What did Hannibal offer you, Mr. Graham?" She tried anew, desperate to keep the conversation in their corner, away from the grace of the god who watched over both their lives.

"Hannibal is a friend." He said simply. "We met through..." He made a face. "Well, after my first meeting with her he hired me to help him take care of your Aunt, told me she'd been disrupting the house and harming him and... I'm assuming you, although he never mentioned you lived here."

He shook his head, pushing a stray lock of hair out of his face. "My turn. Why wouldn't he talk about you, Chiyoh?"

"I don't live in the house, that is his space and it is mutually beneficial for us to live separately." Chiyoh chose her words carefully, her eyes flicking towards where Hannibal was beginning to move, the shifting of a small crowd going with him as he floated through the new and beautiful front garden around the path to the door.

"He is a collector. I am part of his collection." She explained. "I live among simple means that don't suit his taste. It could also have something to do with the fact that after he did away with Aunt Murasaki in her bed as she slept, I brought her back intentionally to torment him."

With that said, she allowed herself a soft smile. "Those could be some of the reasons. Otherwise, he is quite fond of mentioning me as his 'ward', or a student of his. We used to be much closer as young adults, and he… Turned me then. He was my best friend until he allowed his demons to take him like the tide, and now I am relevant only when my existence benefits him."

"He *killed* Lady Murasaki." Will said flatly. "Somehow that doesn't surprise me, but I wish it did. I'm learning quickly that what I know about him doesn't even scratch the surface of who he really is, and in the same breath I'm so damn simple that he knows almost everything about me."

He looked back to Hannibal, his mind missing from behind the movement of his eyes, focused inwards on himself.

"You don't mean-- He doesn't collect... Wards?" He asked, something in his mind visibly crumpling, new anxieties beginning to fester.

"No. Not wards. *Things*. He is a collector of things, and I am an object to him to leave behind forgotten and unattended. But you..." She didn't know how to say it the right way, "He is quite taken with you. Nothing interests him the way you do, but such interest is incredibly dangerous."

Her mind came upon a deepset urge to watch Will get ripped apart by such interest, to see what it would look like if it turned sour and bitter. Hannibal was already heartbroken after he had shown himself to Will, had bared his wants, needs and history to an extent that NO ONE had ever reached and Will had turned right around and literally tried to stab him in the back.

"You have been within the castle, you must understand what I mean when I say he is a collector."

Will nodded once again in agreement. "For someone who's lived as long as he has it makes sense that he gets attached to things that won't die." He said, thinking of the books and the statues, the art and the furniture.

"But I still don't understand where you fit in." He brought back stubbornly. "I know that I'm special to him, but I don't see what's so special about you."

The air hung like toxic rain in between them and Will didn't make eye contact with her, looking anywhere else at this point that wasn't people. Was he bothered by the fact that Hannibal may not truly have chosen Will as his first? That Chiyoh may have been a trailblazer before him in regards to people the man could "teach?"

Perhaps. But that was neither here nor there.

Chiyoh nearly scoffed, bringing in a surprised puff of air through her nose. He was full of thinly veiled self rightfulness and his lack of social skills made him rude. It was clear that her existence was a threat to him, but not for the right reasons. Will Graham was an idiot.

"Nothing about me is special to Hannibal outside of familial ties. I do not entertain his games. He cannot fulfill his need to destroy and create with me any longer, so he leaves me be as I am not interesting enough to kill, but I am interesting enough to keep close. You, however, have a *long* road ahead of you to your own destruction, and you will find him at the crossroads to lead you down the path while also waiting for you at the end of it. You'll find twisted, poison joy when you see him."

Chiyoh felt before she saw Hannibal's eyes on them for real now, the steadily blinding beacon of blue light in his own darkness entirely impossible to ignore. He had dawdled as long he could, attempting to bury the warm emotions from his knowledge of Will's very presence, but he was not eager to pursue vengeance further, not when pride reared its head to gaze upon it's unforgiven and beloved enemy.

Will was dressed for the occasion in the only way he knew how to in tattered, dirty clothes scrubbed tirelessly against a bed of rocks, but he looked beautiful in his barren offering formal regalia. He had been on the Lecter property for under ten minutes and the first thing Hannibal did was saunter his impeccably suited frame right back to him after the man had tried to end his eternal existence for good.

As he approached Hannibal took him in close for microsecond, gaze dropping down Will's frame and back up to his eyes, refusing to hide the sweep of his features. He felt grief and saw the pain of loss brewing just under his skin with the crackling volatile energy that surged

within him - Will's pain was fueling the storm that brewed under his mortal flesh, begging to be cultivated out from under him. Oh, how that lightning and thunder beckoned.

"Good evening, Mr. Graham. I'm honored you could find time in your schedule to make it." He greeted warmly, then looking to Chiyoh as she sipped her champagne.

(He was no doubt suspicious of their interaction and she knew it. Good, that was one small thing she could have control over)

His face remained his usual mask of contentment, if not give or take more haughty glee than usual. "I see you two have become acquainted, that's wonderful. Chiyoh, would you mind if I borrowed Mr. Graham for a moment?"

Chiyoh swallowed her champagne and maintained her polite demeanor knowing full well it would do no good to antagonize. "It is your night, Hannibal. By all means."

Her brows furrowed slightly as she felt the unintentional wave of self satisfaction that radiated off of Will. Of course he was feeling such callous, possessive emotions over a man that coveted him just as much in return.

"Mr. Graham, may I speak to you in private?"

Will indeed felt a sick pleasure burrow into his gut as Hannibal spoke, once again giving himself an excuse to find his way back to Will, back to the man who would hold his destruction within one fist. Chiyoh seemed complacent in what was happening, obviously realising there was nothing she could do to change it. Perhaps she would leave once Hannibal was dead, or maybe she would stay to inherit the castle as it's only surviving owner.

If she didn't exist and Hannibal had been destroyed, Will would have burned the place down and everything in it. The manor was Hannibal, lived and breathed with him, stowing away every treasure that he had collected over the decades he had survived, and therefore could not be permitted to go on without its master, but now that it knew another she should be permitted to keep it, he supposed.

"The man of the hour." Will greeted, looking over today's suit and refusing to hide his interest, not anymore. It fit him perfectly, hugged every curve and took the light of the sun into it's fabric like water.

"If you wish to speak with me on my own I'm afraid I'd become proud. All of these people around and you wish to talk to me - I feel a bit selfish, Doctor Lecter." His voice was as smooth as if he'd rehearsed the lines, void of his usual vocal tics and stammers.

Hannibal took both of Will's hands in his and bowed slightly. "You flatter me. There's no one here I was more keen on hoping to see than you, if I am to be entirely honest."

He felt a bit of schoolboy shyness creep over him from Will's words and immediately cursed himself for allowing it. Will just tried to *murder* him a week ago and here he was now, melting in the presence of the same crackling power that had torn apart the rabbit, the laughing mad man that killed the butcher, the devoted, ruined prisoner who had sullied his

warden… For anyone else he would have designated them a lost cause, but for Hannibal he was all but flirting with his reaper.

"I promised I would come." Will said simply, allowing his hands to be held in Hannibal's cool palms. The man looked sharp and terrifyingly imposing as ever, surrounded by his riches, his people, his collections. It was alluring. Will wanted to crush it.

"I am consistently surprised every time I remember anew that you're not an old hermit in an abandoned shack upon the hill." He admitted. "So much has changed in so little time."

"Indeed it has. I'm surprised myself by that very same notion, but it was indeed time for a change."

As they spoke they moved in mirrored pace, stepping across the grass to the path that lead around the west side of the castle to the back statue garden and courtyard.

With the crowd of the party focused at the front garden and within the main hall of the Castle, Hannibal was leading Will around the perimeter to real privacy.

"I must admit, I was unsure whether you would uphold your promise given the circumstances of our last meeting."

Will had known that this conversation would happen, but it was odd that he thought it would happen later. Something in him had insisted that Hannibal would ignore it, or consider it a conversation for after the party.

"You allowed me to live, Hannibal." He said evenly, as if discussing the weather. "You permitted me to have another day, and in that I found more freedom than I ever imagined."

This side of the castle was framed in flowering vines, honeybees flitting from one blossom to the next. It was gorgeous, and miraculously devoid of people.

"Did you see the fire in the forest last night?" Will continued, trying to remain as impartial as he had been and only slightly failing, his voice barely tense.

Hannibal briefly wondered if he should lie, to pretend his eyes hadn't reflected the very flames that burned Will's clearing to the ground. Did he even owe truth anymore?

"I only saw smoke distantly and briefly. What happened?"

"The Great Red Dragon decided the family he would target next would be mine." Will said, his voice rough. "I caught him a day early in my search of the grounds."

The next part was hard to separate himself from to keep his face impassive. "He killed two of my sisters, one of which I helped... Raise. She was just a child, liked to chase butterflies and eat the filling out of pork buns." He said, crossing his arms as of the admittance would be less vulnerable for it.

Hannibal looked at him and Will knew he was listening, knew he would feel the loss. He allowed the forts of his mind to part just wide enough to let Hannibal see his grief and see the

crumbling edges that surrounded the building rage inside.

"I felt then what it meant to be alive." He admitted further, his tone dark. "You tried to show me before, but I didn't have a true grasp of understanding, I didn't realise the boundaries of my own wrath."

His hands were in fists beside him. "If I were dead and gone there would be not enough punishments for the wicked."

Hannibal stopped in his tracks to listen to Will and his expression softened with empathy and the mutual ache of grief. His mouth opened as if to say something, but he found himself speechless. The wind had been knocked from lungs that had long since drawn their last breath.

Finally. At last Will could see everything Hannibal saw reflected through loss and need, Will's soul tugging at it's chains with a righteous fury, and Hannibal holding the keys to the locks of his shackles.

"You wish to destroy The Dragon for what he has taken from you and everyone else. Many would find comfort in the fact that there is someone out there destroying evildoers to protect the innocent. Do you believe the dragon chose you for that reason, because you were a threat?"

Hannibal rested a hand on Will's shoulder now, assuring and steady.

"He didn't choose me, he chose the love that surrounded me, and that was his mistake." Will said in his contained fury, Hannibal's hand laying heavy.

"He saw the bonds between us and decided we didn't deserve them. He was wrong. We *worked* for our love, every minute of it was fought for with tooth and nail, nothing came easy. Those other families did nothing for their luxuries and we lived in the dirt without care and he must have hated it even more, that all we needed is to be surrounded by that support... He couldn't stand it."

His muscles tinged in pain with how tense he held them through his shoulders. "I don't *wish* to destroy him, I will. That kind of love is earned and he's done nothing to gain it or keep it, just to kill it. He doesn't *deserve* to live without understanding that and I'm not going to teach him, Hannibal."

This was a stepping stone, he said to his mind, trying to relax his shoulders into the touch of the other man. The dragon was first... The lesser of two evils that he knew of.

Hannibal squinted slightly with the realization that washed over his features - the storm brewing under Will's skin wasn't for the Dragon. Will was *truly* changed now, a dangerous man, and Hannibal felt goose bumps tickle up his arms and spine.

"I need to know if you are going to try to kill me again, Will."

Will kept his cool tone and even expression as he shrugged. He knew Hannibal was invested in him. There was no doubt after he left him alive yesterday - and the man would be even more elated now that he knew what Will wanted.

"I can't kill you now, Hannibal." He said truthfully. "I've only just forgiven you." His head tilted just slightly to the side.

Hannibal glowed.

"If you don't intend to teach the Dragon, what do you intend to show him?"

They were entirely alone now, surrounded by flower beds and hedges and artfully crafted marble into the likenesses of Hannibal's angel. He walked over to the fountain and sat on the edge, looking over Will slowly.

Hannibal was revelling in Will's change, and the druid could visibly see it. It was intoxicating, how he was obviously smitten with this feeling of power drifting off Will, and it hit him for the first time that that's what it *was*.

He not only did what Hannibal wanted, Will was *what* Hannibal wanted. He had a Vampire under his thumb, worshipful and reverent at his feet. Will was high on the feeling, and the two of them dominated the area of the garden they stood in, crackling with energy in different avenues.

With this much raw power on their side, no one could stop them, Will thought lazily, like a cat in the sun.

He finished his steps to close the distance between he and Hannibal, settling to stand between the Count's legs as he himself stayed standing looking down. He reached two fingers out on one hand to crook them under the sharp angle of Hannibal's chin, making sure they were connected, making sure he made his statement clear. This was his request.

"I know what you are. I know what you can do, and I know my limits. Obviously I can't do much against a dragon, and my family tried. I can't stand against the fire."

He leaned down just slightly, making sure Hannibal could see the angry mottled scar over the side of his neck.

"Will you help me kill him, Hannibal?"

Slowly the demon began to smile, pupils narrowing into sharp slits. Swirling black smoke pulsed at the corners of Will's vision.

"You know what I am and you have no fear for the existence of the damned that lays in front of you? The price for *our power*, Will..." A strong icy hand caught Will's wrist in its grip and he gently inspected it, turning it over gingerly, gaze trained on ash stained fingernails and rough calluses.

Their hands were almost an exact blueprint of the differences between the two of them. Hannibal had strong but delicate and long fingers, soft palms that had blue toned veins

spiderwebbed over the butt of his thumb and down his wrist. Will's hands were thicker, rougher and scarred. His skin was callused from years inside his beast shape that toughened the pads of his front paws. They were equally beautiful and deadly and Hannibal treated them as if they were the most delicate treasure.

Hannibal had taken it as an invitation to... To turn him, Will realised. The thought nearly knocked the air out of him and he worked hard to maintain his composure. Was that something he truly wanted? At first it had been his goal to set the Dragon and the beast within Hannibal against each other. Perhaps that would weaken the vampire enough to kill him. But...

The offer hung in the air. It wasn't blunt, it was effused by Hannibal's beautiful language and irresistible touch. OUR power. OUR existence.

It would get so lonely, living that long with no one, he realised. Would it be worth it?

"Prove it to me, that I should take your gift." He said after a moment of thought, watching Hannibal inspect him like a delicate flower that was covered in calluses and dirt and scars.

He swallowed hard. "If you can do that... I'll be yours."

Hannibal had his nose pressed to Will's knuckles as his eyes fluttered closed with Will's proposal. He was telling the truth, and it rang loudly through Hannibal's head overwhelmingly loudly, cathedral bells at noon.

He opened up and the kings of hell spoke through him. "Oh darling, you already are."

Suddenly he was standing and had Will's head tilted back, looking deeply into his eyes. He held either side of his scruffy face tenderly and observed every emotion that skated across his brow.

"Tell me you want me to kill the Great Red Dragon, Will. Say that you'll be mine again if I do. I want you to remember that truth. I want you to say it clearly with the assurance it is what you want. I'll do anything you ask... But you must tell me the truth. Always."

Will felt Hannibal's mind surround his, and where before it was like a sprawling group of tentacles, now it was a moat rising against the sides of the castle in his mind, infecting every brick and tile and molecule of air. It was stifling and possessive - Hannibal wanted all of him, and he thought he knew how to take it.

But he knew how to take it from people that *were not and would never be Will.*

Instead of allowing the waters to rise further, Will let his expression relax, his pupils blown as his heart swelled in his chest, a fallen cherub in the devil's grasp. He was a compass, and this man was his true North.

"You know the truth. You don't need it given and there's no need to take it from me." He murmured, a full shudder making his knees weaken, held strong and sure by Hannibal's grasp.

"You have me." He said, before leaning forward and up to press their lips together in a searing kiss.

There in the back garden, at the edge of the fountain that bubbled with clear water as the full moon began to rise behind them, Hannibal's grip softened as Will's lips met his. The great tug of fate had brought the two of them right to where they belonged.

It was deep and abrupt, hungry, and Hannibal stroked soft hands over Will's face as he teased apart his lips with soft nibbles before slipping his tongue inside to taste with a gasp.

Will sighed into the kiss as Hannibal's lips parted, eyes slipping closed against the gentle rhythm of Hannibal's movements. They were framed by the gentle winds wafting over the cool water of the fountain, the light of the rising moon glistening off Hannibal's hair and making him appear ascended.

"If I went back to the party, no one would care - yet here I am with the man of the hour as a captured dove." He murmured, drawing back from Hannibal and watching his eyes hover over their mouths, eager to press into him once again.

"You have so much to do tonight." He said, reluctantly stepping away from the man and sitting at the fountain's edge. "Don't let me keep you from your party - I'll be here, Hannibal."

The moonlight filtered through his curly hair like the shadow of healthy spring leaves, and he let himself smile, once again allowing Hannibal to see his clumsy, unsure grin.

Hannibal caught one of his hands in his own, dizzy from their kiss.

"Of all the company I could have within this night, yours is the only one I could give a damn about, Will."

"Please stay with me tonight... After all the guests have gone. And I'll show you exactly how out matched The Great Red Dragon is."

The invitation stood stark white against the blues and blacks of the evening, written in ink that dripped down the path of their journey as a beacon. It had been a long time coming to see this point on the horizon, Will thought. So much had happened since he had first met Hannibal, and so much still was to come. If he hadn't come up the hill, where would he be?

It was almost a painful sentiment to think about. Hannibal had changed everything. He'd changed Will, taken the middle of his book and ripped it in half and had begun to write a new chapter of his own volition, and thinking about it made the druid ache.

At this point all he could do was to keep reading. He'd stay, of course he would stay.

"Where else would I go?"

In Which The Party Guests Are Promptly Ignored

Chapter Summary

Sorry for the break, Matt got a divorce lol

"Where else would I go?"

The question hit Hannibal hard in the chest like a physical impact. Will belonged right there, it was true. He had his place now, and Hannibal had someone to share himself with.

He gently raised Will's hand to his lips and kissed his knuckles, his skin shining in the beams of the moon that reflected off the sparkling water of the fountain. Will was HIS.

"I'll return to you once the evening concludes. Enjoy yourself however you please in the meantime." The taller man was glowing, his hand lingering on Will's as he began to leave.

"I'll come right back to you, I promise."

The night was still young, and the wet paint of the moon's gentle rays dried slowly over the surface of everything it touched. Will took the time to sharpen a stick idly into a tiny stake, driving the point into his thumb and nearly breaking skin before the twig itself snapped, falling onto his shoe with a hollow plink.

He thought of the offer Hannibal had so freely raised, remembering the power given to him to be just a sample of true might, the potential of a gift leaving its mark. What it had already allowed him to create was truly breathtaking, but Will found himself wishing he was more reluctant.

He didn't have any human connections and his druid companions would die before he did anyway, so to live too long would not affect him like most mortals, he considered. Eternity was the most terrifying prospect of it all, not the lust, wrath or greed, but he was not sitting under an umbrella of common lives lived.

It gave him the opportunity to exist as a gate for as long as he wanted, something reminded him eagerly. To never pass up the chance to miss his calling again, enough to rid the world of many sad and aching sources of torment.

He was still contemplating with various levels of scepticism when Hannibal returned, he realised - this wasn't something he'd thought over as much as he should have, all considering.

In the time he was gone, Hannibal's head was free floating somewhere high above the clouds. He was positively glowing with radiance that had seen the light of God and had been touched by Him. The bright white-blue beacon that shined forth from Will had Hannibal blinded with

it's Grace anew and he found himself rapidly approaching salvation through the man's damnation, a future that would be spent with them together.

His discussion with his guests was trivial and distant. Hannibal cared not now for optics or the way he would be remembered for the night, at least in terms of how social he was or how many compliments he decided to feed to hungry ears. They gorged themselves on excellent food and we're surrounded by opulence, and that would be enough. His presence, although he knew it to be a gift, would be insinuated rather than granted.

Directly from the kitchen, Hannibal brought a serving tray to the back garden where Will waited. A turbulent sea of thoughts played on his face and anyone could smell the anxiety on him. What a fortune he would pay to read his thoughts in prose.

Hannibal smiled, placing the tray down infront of Will. "I brought you some supper. I thought it would suit you better to have it here all to yourself than at my table," He chuckled. This was much more appropriate for his Will. Just the two of them together, intimate and away from the superficiality of society.

"Thank you." Will said, eyeing the plate as if it may get up and wander away, overly skeptical as his stomach protested such hesitation.

"I appreciate your... Recipes. What kind of meat is this?" He held the plate gingerly on his lap in both hands, gaze steadfast.

Hannibal full-on grinned. Adorable skepticism.

"Beef heart tartare," He lifted the steel lid to the tray to reveal a few dishes, "Lobster tail with lemon butter, an herb salad, and aged scotch. I Won't bore you with the fanfare or the specifics of my preparation."

He sits next to Will at the edge of the fountain, crossing his legs relaxed.

"You can't possibly take my reluctance to be unreasonable." Will said haughtily, ignoring the silverware and picking up a piece of dinner bread to take a healthy scoop of tartare, stuffing it into his mouth and then freezing, sighing, and looking up at Hannibal. His gaze communicated well articulated delight and also reluctance to admit he'd very much forgotten how good the other man was at cooking. Hannibal didn't comment, the smug bastard.

"When I was younger-" he said in the middle of very hungry bites, torn between the prospects of taking as long as he could to eat and to get it all in his stomach as fast as possible, "-my mom used to cook the lobster that my dad and I would bring back from our boat trips."

He licked his lips, taking a ginger sip of the scotch and finding it elegantly aged and smooth, dancing along his taste buds delightfully and warming his stomach. "Oh Christ."

"You were a fisherman with your father?" Hannibal's head tilted as he leaned towards Will, imagining a small boy with bouncing curls, cheeks and nose flushed pink with the chill spray of ocean air.

"Fisherman." Will said dismissively with a slight shake off his head. "I was a child."

"The first time lobster was served at our table, Mischa cried when she found out our cook had dropped them into the boiling pot alive," Hannibal glanced downward, pausing for a second before he continued, "I also... May have been the one that shared with her that fact."

He teased her a great deal when they were young. He was curious about her and her emotional sensitivities and would test them, experimenting with her emotional boundaries. (He carefully omitted the fact that he also told Mischa that they scream as they are boiled alive. Lady Murasaki caned him when she found out that he was the cause of Mischa's hysterics which had the poor little girl inconsolable for hours.)

His words were soft as he spoke about her, thinking of how deeply empathetic Mischa is... Was. Was. She and Will were alike in that way, feeling so deeply for others no matter the pain it caused them.

Will snorted, starting on the lobster with a fork this time, genuinely careful not to drop butter off the plate. "I was a bit of a wuss and tried to kill them before they went into the water once. Tried to break their necks."

He chewed thoughtfully, making a pleased sound at the well-cooked meat and the zestiness of the lemon. "I ended up pulling the head off of one entirely accidentally and then did that to all the others because it was.. Generally easier. When my dad found me he didn't punish me, but I think it was just because he was incredibly confused."

Something in Hannibal's brain tickled at the thought of the young cherubic boy panicking, trying to twist the heads off of live lobsters, unintentionally creating greater cruelties.

Will licked his thumb. "I just wanted it to be over quickly, but they had to die. Natural order, and all that. Didn't see the point in the whole boiling thing."

He looked up at Hannibal again, curious. "Why do you boil them alive?"

"I don't, actually. I always push the tip of my knife into the head before cooking. I see no need for unnecessary suffering." Hannibal gently picked up the second crystal tumbler off of the tray and poured scotch for himself, swirling it in the glass before sipping.

Will feigned surprise and exaggeratedly opened his mouth with a little head wobble towards Hannibal as if the concept of kindness to animals had never occurred to him.

"Oh gee, Doctor Lecter. Sorry for assuming." He said, the corner of his mouth lifting despite himself as he picked up his empty glass, taking the initiative to refill it himself.

"As you should be."

Will knew he was distracting himself, but with his belly swiftly filling with good food and drink he couldn't find it within him to care. He'd done a lot of caring, and to take a break like this was cathartic, like a hefty cough to break up the fluids in his lungs and throat.

The liquor hit him differently than the liquor in Jack's office, making him a little softer around the edges.

"Don't you have guests to go back to?" He said after a moment of comfortable silence. "People to shower you with compliments and praise?"

One of Hannibal's hands lifted to gently brush Will's knuckles. "I may be extravagant but I don't need their flattery to assure my ego. It's my party, and if I choose to spend it right here with you and no one else I will." He said honestly, the liquor in his own system soothing him greatly.

This felt simple. This felt normal. Under different circumstances Will would have found himself entirely romanced, enticed by Hannibal's fingers skirting over the skin on the back of his hand, tender and affectionate. Instead his chest hurt as his heart swelled, wishing Hannibal were just... Evil. Was it selfish to wish the situation were more black and white? To think of it without a clear answer? Would it be clear to anyone else?

He allowed his palm to turn up and intertwined their fingers together, staring at the sign of affection as if they were branding one another. Every new thing he did to extend kindness to this man felt like a self-inflicted wound that didn't hurt, scarring over immediately. Something external that he would pretend did not affect him at all ends of every spectrum.

He set his platter to the opposite side of him, cleaned and scraped of every bite of the decadent food.

"I don't know how to navigate relationships." He admitted softly. "I know they say communication is important, but I don't know how much patience you truly need to have to pursue someone like me, I don't have any tips. Adversely, I'd imagine you're much the same way, unless you have parties like this more often and they've managed to escape my notice. You might just be an aristocrat on the outside, smooth talking and charismatic. Interpersonally..."

He realized he had been rambling, and looked back at their intertwined fingers. "Damn, this Scotch is something else."

"Will Graham, I have walked this earth for nearly seven hundred years. My existence by nature is patient." Hannibal said, his thumb rubbing soft circles on the back of Will's hand, "I'll admit I hadn't seen value in romantic relationships for a very long time. I can't even remember the last relationship I had."

"Seven hundred years." Will murmured, remembering in a rush that he wasn't, truly, the one who needed assistance to communicate properly in any fashion and that was a ridiculous thing to worry about, wasn't it? As though they were both young merchants discussing elopement?

"Seven hundred fucking years, Hannibal." He repeated as if that would lessen the blow of such information. That long in a castle so vast you couldn't even hope to glimpse the four corners of each wall from one place, with a sister in the forest and an aunt who you tired of so completely that you killed.

"Why me?" He said desperately, needing to hear it laid out before him, completely laid to waste by the possibility of Hannibal's resolve.

The Count felt stung, taking light offense. "You MUST know." He said, the obviousness of the situation feeling surreal. Will's expression didn't change.

"You stumbled into my path and every time you leave, it's as though you take a part of me with you. I don't have an answer to "why" Will, but from the moment I saw you it felt as though the hundreds of years I spent idling on this Earth were to prepare me to meet you."

It was such a bizarre answer. The notion of romantic, blissfully passionate *love* was something Will hadn't even considered until what felt like seconds ago, but the fact of the matter was Hannibal seemed utterly convinced that Will was his one and only, his soulmate, the man who tried to kill him a week before and he had killed instead. Didn't love confessions usually have something to do with personalities instead of how interwoven they felt through each other's time and space?

"If you asked me, my answer would be less prolific." He said simply, feeling spiteful. What would it sound like if he just said "I feel the same way"? There was no confession less satisfying than 'same here.'

"I'd say it was because of your endless passion for the arts, and to everything you do. Nothing is half assed, always with purpose. I enjoy how we can pick up a conversation as if we've never been apart... And I think every conversation is in turn incredibly interesting. You couldn't ever convince me you were boring."

He sighed. He wished he didn't have any sort of answer for why he found Hannibal so irresistible, but he had so many answers it pained him. Will preferred being able to hate without stipulations, but this graceful, interesting, beautiful man made it endlessly difficult.

Hannibal's face softened with a flush of affection that suddenly bloomed from his chest and rushed to his head, his body light. "You once said everything I do is for the romance of it, but my attraction to you isn't purely based out of romantic enticements. Every moment I spend with you, I am engaged and interested in any and everything you have to say."

Will realised with a tug in his chest that he wanted to kiss Hannibal again. The first time he'd done it to shut him up, but this time... There wasn't enough manipulation in it, it was just a genuine want, irrational and selfish in nature.

Hannibal was a monster, but he did have a heart. Everything they'd said here hadn't been to reach a goal, it had been real and genuine. Will wasn't strong enough to resist what his body wanted now, even if he didn't know why.

He gave in after Hannibal noticed him staring at his lips, but did nothing. It was up to Will again, and he was greedy for it.

Their lips met with a soft and slow caress, fitting together so tenderly he could practically weep. Will's hand came up to thread into Hannibal's long, grey-blonde hair, tangling in the

soft strands while both of Hannibal's hands moved up and soft fingers carefully stroked against Will's cheeks, holding either side of his head as they kissed.

They both took their time with this, different from the first time. Will shut the blinds to the protests of his rational mind and lost himself. His patience lasted longer than he had anticipated before his tongue introduced itself, drawing over Hannibal's top lip to taste his skin and pushing into his teeth, experimental and timid.

Hannibal responded happily and there was a sudden sharp twinge of pain as the points of two teeth threatened to break skin for an intense moment and it made Will gasp, heart jumping into his chest as Hannibal scraped at him dangerously and his voice followed suit in octaves as he whined faintly before pulling away, Hannibal's mouth following him as he went.

"Don't. Bite me." He hissed, feeling as if he were scolding a dangerously predatory cat, but even as he did so he was putting a leg over Hannibal's to sit on his knee, refusing to draw away. A low, pleased sound made it's way up from Hannibal's chest and tickled against Will's tongue as large hands slowly moved down his sides to rest on his hips.

"You seemed to enjoy it so much the last time I tried." He said, feigning simplicity. "You encourage misbehavior so eagerly, how am I to learn? "

"You and I remember last time very differently." Will growled, Hannibal's hands on his waist falling to brush across his ass, long fingers teasing.

He moved in to take Hannibal's lower lip gingerly between his teeth, pulling it away from his mouth and across his own tongue, pinching it lightly and spreading both hands over the back of Hannibal's head to hold him close, knowing he was the only man with the option to control such a powerful creature for only a moment.

Hannibal's words caught I'm his throat as he allowed Will to bite and tug, delighted by the action and feeling a shiver run into his stomach. His hands slid slowly down the few inches to completely cover the ample swell of Will's ass, pressing him harder against his midsection as he pulled his head back against the tug of Will's teeth.

It turns into something harder to keep track of quickly, flirting with danger in human form like this. Will takes his time with hungry nips and bites, moving in where Hannibal does the same, capturing his kisses until they shine with saliva and the man below him is panting, growing hot and firm under Will's knee. The druid pushes against him experimentally, rubbing his own growing arousal down into the silk mixture of Hannibal's pants and makes a soft, surprised noise when he's squeezed hard over his ass, followed by a grunt from his partner.

Hannibal's noises were intense and incredibly sexual, spiraling into Will's mouth and down to his groin. He was held down now so completely that he couldn't pull away even if he tried, Hannibal's grasp strong and sure.

His own grasp on control was slowly disappearing, and his eyes slipped closed for the first time as he lost himself in sensation.

Hannibal had his hands firmly on Will's ass now, moving his lips and tongue slowly down his jaw to lap and tease at his neck. He could feel Will's blood pulsing through his veins just under his incisors... Euphoria was one sharp push into hot and tender flesh. He moaned against Will's pulse point, settling just to inhale his scent there deeply. Will said no biting. He had promised.

"Will..." Hannibal purred against his ear, a beast completely at the mercy of the other man and he could feel that Will knew it. That he LIKED it. It felt like butterflies were flapping through his chest. Will was the only one that had ever made him feel like this and he was the only one who would ever be allowed to see it.

The other man obviously noticed such an outward display of submission, feeling Hannibal's face all but shoved in the crook of his neck, inhaling like a near-drowned man in his eagerness to taste. It was a humble gesture, already so devoted and worshipful, and it drove him to the edge. He remembered the nights of dull, throbbing pleasure. He remembered the last time Hannibal had bit him there, had brought him to such an intense euphoria that Will had been reluctant to slip into the clutches of his own death.

Death it was that awaited, he supposed.

He pulled away with all manner of reluctance, stepping off of Hannibal's lap and wiping the saliva from his mouth with one thumb. What he said was soft, but clear.

"The Dragon."

Hannibal was left with his mouth slightly agape, pupils blown wide with just a glowing crimson rim around deep blackness. He blinked a few times and seamlessly pulled himself back together.

He gently smoothed over the lapels of his jacket before smiling with pure cheekiness, cheeks flushed pink as he tucks a loose strand of his hair back behind his ear.

"My apologies for distracting you."

He looked beautiful like this, Will thought. A tad flustered but maintaining a well-defined elegance that was so natural and comfortable it would put a lesser man at ease, but look deeper and one could sense the danger lurking just below the surface of his skin, ready to pounce.

"Meet me in the sculpture garden after your party has officially concluded." Will said, drawing back to gesture for Hannibal's departure, which he did reluctantly.

It was dark in the sculpture garden, everything in shadow after the rapidly setting sun had spoken it's farewells. Will settled himself at the edge of it, picking tiny sticks from the ground and concentrating enough energy to set them smoking. He couldn't channel enough heat to set anything ablaze, and he once again faced the fact that he was weak. In Hannibal's presence he was strong, smart and resourceful in his mind, but he couldn't hold a candle to anyone physically unless he took a wild shape. Even in that he was nothing impressive against anyone who wasn't a helpless human without leverage for a weapon.

He needed Hannibal to fight the dragon because without him there was nothing he could do. His family hadn't been able to do anything either, and there were far more than just him to assist. After that fight, a wounded Hannibal who had succeeded against such a powerful opponent would probably be much easier to down, but Will wasn't even sure that would be enough, and then where would he stand?

The twig in his hand smoked cheerily like incense into the night, and he blew on it gently, coaxing. He was there a long while, but the minutes ran together as they often did, and soon the moon was high overhead.

As Will waited Hannibal moved through the courtyard back to the manor, his form only visible in the direct rays of the moon, completely disappearing into the darkness of the shadows and then reappearing under the beams.

Francis had failed and it was a pity for HIM but it was to be such a great victory for Will. He blinked away his visible arousal, crimson rims going completely black in the darkness as he once again approached the festivities. He blended back into conversations and guests seamlessly, eyes crinkling in the corners as thoughts far away from his party lurked.

As the night carried on guests began to disperse, the heavy weight of every consciousness beginning to lift off the property and off of its Master. Hannibal let out a soft contented sigh, feeling as if a migraine was finally subsiding now that his space was much less crowded. He felt Will in the statue garden and began his steps back to him before he stopped in his tracks after hearing a rapid knocking at his front door, annoyed. He knew exactly who was on the other side and he certainly wasn't thrilled. His lips formed a tight line of displeasure as he clicked his tongue. Wonderful. After he had finished a fresh set of renovations...

He moved quickly back to the door and opened it unceremoniously, the mask of pleasant contentment returning to his face.

"Good evening, Francis. To what do I owe the *honor* of your presence?"

In Which The Dragon Should Have Feared

Chapter by Princewelcomematt (Vagab0nd)

Chapter Summary

> This one is a little shorter to prepare for the massive uh... Citrus scene in the next chapter and a few of the ones following. Thanks for waiting, we love you. ❤️💕🥰

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

> Author's note
>
> Will thinks of Hannibal like an intentional wildfire in the plains of his mind. He is dangerous and could do good for Will but could also do great harm. He can change Will irreparably but he may also be breathtakingly beautiful... And fire is gorgeous, you can tear your eyes away and still it's heat can be a comfort if you maintain a comfortable distance at the right times.
>
> Hannibal is fucking gorgeous. He's knowledgeable and funny and warm, or- can be. He's understanding and has a deep well of empathy. He's also endlessly selfish and cruel. But Hannibal says that they are *one*. When he's selfish, he means for Will too, and he means he wants to protect him and keep him safe for *obsessive* reasons.
>
> But... being desired like that. Being *seen* and being so *very* loved for who every part of you is... You can get drunk on that feeling, and Will is, in essence, an alcoholic.

Francis was looking down at the threshold and Hannibal could FEEL the shame and embarrassment radiating off of him.

"I Apologize for the late hour Dr. Lecter, but I..."

Francis met Hannibal's eyes a bit urgently, his head turning on a swivel as if he was being watched.

(He was, of course.)

"May I come in..?"

Hannibal nodded once and stepped out of the large Dragonborne's path to let him into the foyer before closing the door. Francis' tail twitched as he moved past the demon.

"Dr. Lecter, I failed." His voice was hoarse and full of regret.

Hannibal leant back against a nearby table, also decorated to the nines. It was ever the picture of calm and concern.

"Tell me everything that happened."

Having already heard what had happened from Will, the doctor stared unblinkingly in front of him as he felt the bubble of someone else's rage stir in his gut from the loss of a small puppy he had never met. He decided to rearrange the flowers on the table.

"Will Graham could sense that I was waiting among the edge of his mind's eye." Francis said gruffly. "However, I underesstimated his family. I knew they could turn into dogss, but many of them took other, bigger forms."

Hannibal didn't say anything.

"I burned their home to the ground." Francis said offhandedly, and this is when a certain Will Graham joined the conversation, tucking himself into the corner of the door frame and the wall.

"I tried to catch them as they escaped, but could only manage to slay two." Francis continued with a sigh. "If I hadn't been found out early we would have been at the height of power tonight but now they are hidden..."

"You failed to change most of them." Hannibal looked up from his careful examination of the flower blossoms, knowing Will was here with him now and feeling the ache of his heart.

Will didn't contribute, his expression looking slightly vacant. He looked at Hannibal and at Francis and his skin rippled as if he was holding back a shift he couldn't control, pain settling into him like frost. The Dragon noticed him far too late, strong back clumsily and trying to cover his horror.

"What--??" he growled, his wings flying out to either side of him, tail whipping into the air. "How did you.... What is thisss--"

"Tread lightly, Francis." Hannibal calmly replied, his left hand scooping the air into his palm, a cloud of lightning crackling out of his pores like black veins of electricity. He threw the cloud like a ball, underhand and gentle to make it fly within the air to land on the other's sternum.

Francis took the eldritch blast hard and was flung backwards, his large form cracking through the front door and into the front garden. Will was taken aback at the modest display - the vampire hadn't done much of anything to prepare for how hard his blow would hit.

(Hannibal's brows came together in annoyance, thinking about how *now he'd* just have to do all the renovation work *over again.*)

"Darling, do follow closely or it may be over too soon." He said and shot a knowing glance to Will, the change in expression dramatic. The usually soft-spoken gentleman's face was

twisted slightly with a childlike stubbornness tinged with pure glee, achieved only by witnessing his own true power for the first time in a good age.

Will wanted to see everything he could become, so Hannibal was going to show him.

On the inside the druid felt numb, hit with wave after wave of gut-wrenching horror and pain and confusion. He wanted to shout, destroy, explode like a bomb with a timer set to three, decimating the entire house.

A modicum of peace had re-entered his life and then been taken away once again. It was a cycle of maltreatment and Will could see nothing but red, every bit of kindness draining from him, the image of caged wrath helpless in it's restraints. He followed as if he was floating.

Francis roared and fire ripped out of him, so hot it was white and blue, the light of the moon making him ferocious. The plants around him caught on fire and surrounded him in heat, eyes flickering gold.

"Sso we are both your victimss, Lecter?!" He said, looking manic. "Are we ssimply pawnss in your game to be sssacrificed for the good of the king?"

Hannibal moved smoothly and slowly now, but Will knew for a fact he could move hundreds of feet in a blink. He could solve his problem instantly, but was now obviously and intentionally taking his time. He was appreciating his art.

"Not true, Francis," Hannibal's tone was light, all elegant manners even as his shadow grew on the ground beyond him, twisting and becoming crooked. Hiislips spread wide allowing a forked, pitch black tongue to push through sharp teeth to lick at the air.

"And if this is chess, than I'm afraid to tell you that I am not the king."

The Dragon sneered, baring all of his teeth in a chilling snarl. He was obviously confused and unhinged - the one man that had truly understood him, his only ally, someone who had been eager to see him succeed was this. Everything he had hoped for was shattered. Would he be suffering such consequences if that *human* had not gotten so *lucky?*

The human watched, shaking. This could play out in two ways, but truly he didn't know which was more likely to happen, and there was no way he could plan for either. Francis grunted, gaze darting between Will and Hannibal before he sprung like a freed coil towards the Druid, fire following in his wake like a jetstream.

"An unfortunate lapse in judgement." Hannibal's eyes narrowed and he stepped forwards unseen at full speed, hitting Francis full force with his tall, full body, flinging the raging dragonborne across the front lawn.

Francis' body dragged a long scar into the lawn, spraying dirt, rocks, and grass in his wake and Hannibal appeared on top of him as if his body were made of lead, weighing the beast down immovably.

Francis jaw gnashed open and shut up at the man who took control and immediately stood on his throat with one immovable steel foot. His claws were digging wildly into the skin of Hannibal's legs, tearing at his trousers and dragging gashes into the muscle. The victim of such behavior paid no notice.

"The value you place upon yourself is so low that it shows in your techniques." Hannibal said before backing up completely, crossing his arms and looking down his long nose.

Francis got up as fast as he could with a whining sort of yell, but was struck at the base of his skull after half a second, making his vision explode into white stars.

"It would have heeded you greatly were you to love yourself more than I did - which of course is a limit easy to surpass."

Francis' jaw smashed onto the pavement and he howled. He couldn't think or breathe. He tried to roll around to face upwards but now Hannibal had fused the right side of his face into the ground in a humiliating display of power.

"Tell me at least I had a chance." He said, soft and wet.

Hannibal raised his right hand, void of any silver or boone, just bones and flesh visible before it dove swiftly into the Dragon's chest to his forearm. It was freed within the same second, tearing his heart from it's throne.

"It would have been a favor to the world to love yourself, because no one else had a reason to."

Hannibal was a powerful figure in the beams of the moon, beautiful and severe as his mouth opened wider than humanly possible to bite straight into the fresh heart. It was visceral and sloppy and loud, like a wild animal fed for the first time in an age. This was a self-serving reminder of complete and overwhelming pride in power.

The display was gory and jarring and Will pictured it recorded in scripture, Satan seizing the very image of death and tearing it apart as a symbol of his life. If anything the scene should have been agony to Will's ears and eyes to witness, but instead the man only witnessed it as a performance, a grand spectacle meant for him.

It was a revelation for an exhausted mind - for finally it dawned on him that he would never stop Hannibal as a mere *beast*. One could not strike Lucifer even using the sharpest sword. Only a matched power, unrestrained and uncaged, cherished and built in a sick deluge of poisoned adoration and *love* could take this demon down.

If there was no love Hannibal would have remained unmatched for his long and winding future, but somewhere it began twisting inside of Will like the tiniest root, young and green and shooting into his soul to become an interwoven, intimate bond.

He walked to Hannibal newly unafraid, knowing he was in no danger. The monster looked at the height of euphoria and Will was quick to catch up, glimpsing the destroyed corpse of the

Dragon but far more interested in touching the living shadow before him, inhumanly sized and dripping in sinew.

Will reached up to dip his fingers through what covered Hannibal's jaw, sliding them along the mess he'd made between his pointer finger and middle and dragging it down to his mouth to taste it, closing his eyes.

Hannibal slowly shifted downwards as if he was melting, his form re-molded as he pulled what remained of Francis' heart away from his mouth, his lips and mouth and chin coated in it. The scent of his blood filled the air around them, earthy and floral-sweet. It suited the strong but deep tenderness the dragon hid away from the world.

Hannibal was bleeding from his thighs and calves where Francis had clawed at him in his last moments, and cloves and cinnamon wafted up into Will's nostrils before the wounds began to close rapidly, clotting in his shirt and under long hair completely loose about his shoulders, a regal display elegantly marred by violence. Francis' blood was sweet and tangy like citrus but the aroma of Hannibal that was now quickly permeating the air took Will's attention as the figure filled his vision, his mind, and his future.

It felt vulnerable here, somehow. Hannibal had just ended the life of someone he had previously allied with for *Will* (always for Will) and now he was untethered to reality, dripping with the mess he had made, truly bared. He had let Will see him and the druid found that he could only be in awe of such power, was shaken by it, was terrified - but not for himself, not anymore.

He was a monster. Completely tethered to violence and horrible trauma that he could never escape and didn't seem interested in.l

"You're beautiful."

The words were soft. The words were true. Hannibal moved his hand to finger at the fabrics of Will's shirt.

The promise that Will had made earlier in that evening felt like it had been sworn only minutes before and everything concerning the sentence had warped in meaning and in power, so changed was the original intent into what it was now.

Will found he didn't much care anymore. Who was he in the past versus now, and where would he go from here if he were to walk away? That shouldn't even be put into consideration at this point. There was nothing going forward that he wanted that didn't involve Hannibal, dead or alive. His family could be protected. His family would be better off without him, regardless. There was one question he had and that was all he needed now.

"When did you decide... That the Dragon..."

Hannibal interrupted him. "Very close to when you tried to kill me, I think."

Relief. Twisted, ugly relief.

"Even Steven."

"Will." Their breath mixed and tickled across each other's faces, Hannibal's lips kissing softly across his cheek as he wrapped his arms securely around him.

Will leaned in as Hannibal caressed the back of his neck and encouraged his head to fall further backwards.

"Now that you have seen all of me are you sure this this what you want? Do you want me," Hot breath puffed against Will's pulse point, "as I am? Warts and all?"

There was a moment. "Are you sure you want to ask me such an obtuse question in order to risk an equally obtuse answer?" Will answered in a belated echo, and the silence stretched on, weighted with emotion.

"Yes. Hm. Then come with me." Hannibal took a hold of Will's hand and swiftly led him back to the manor and up to his chambers, past old lamps and sparkling glass windows. It was impossible to track how quickly they were moving and even more so how they did it completely on synch.

Will hadn't even known prior to this where the bedroom was.

Chapter End Notes

Any recommendations or expectations? Give us a comment! (Please)

In Which They Find Ecstasy

Chapter Summary

Yeah it's just... Six thousand words of sex. :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal's bedroom was beautiful and severe, elegantly decorated with hand crafted furniture and fine drapes framing french doors that lead out to the open balcony. The bed was large and impressively clothed and there was a separate room off to it's right, presumably for bathing and other related activities.

The host of the night turned to Will and drew him into the bedroom with a strong movement that also shut the door.

"I'll need to prepare you first. It's best that you are as stress free as possible before we begin."

Suddenly this is foreign, something catching Will off guard. He'd expected the violent pleasure that Hannibal had promised before, he'd thought perhaps there would be more pain akin to accepting a curse, or that he would be asked to sacrifice something MORE, not this. Not even a neighbor to this.

It was not ultimately unpleasant in nature, but it completely threw Will off and it was all he could do not to trip over the thick carpet, pressed into Hannibal's chest.

"Why is *this* more intimidating than you holding a bloody heart an inch from my face?" He said weakly. Hannibal's bloodstained grin pulled around his fangs.

"Despite my best efforts, I only seem to impress you with my small gestures" He said, as though he were heartbroken.

Will cracked a shy smile, which directly vanished in the moment following.

"After I turn you, do you plan on attempting to kill me again?" The vampire asked simply.

There wasn't a response immediately, leaving a space for bloody fingers to move uninterrupted down the front of Will's shirt, Hannibal's expression morphing, darkening as it followed the path of pale flesh that was slowly revealed.

Will let his shirt slide off of his shoulders and pool around his feet, clumsy fingers rising to his partner's silk string ties and pulling them loose as well so his appearance was mirrored,

taking the fancy dinner coat with it. His hands came away slick with the blood of the Dragon, flickering in the candlelight, and his gaze lingered as he thought.

"I don't know." He said honestly. He didn't really want to lie at the moment, and he knew very well the answer wouldn't change the outcome of the night. Hannibal had said it outright that he was *curious*, not any variant of *afraid*.

"Had the Dragon acted differently, had it not been over so quickly... Were you hoping to watch him kill me?"

Hannibal was strong and more broadly muscled than his sharp and lean wardrobe could do justice. He had all shades of dark hair covering his chest and running down his stomach that was covered over by a layer of fat, protecting a solid build. His nails rain tickling trails down the front of Will's chest before leaning in against his ear.

"Would it have pleased you to watch him *hurt* me?"

Hannibal's hands ran lower on Will's body, gripping the front of Will's trousers as the side of his tongue slowly teased the lobe of his ear.

Will opened his mouth to answer before Hannibal's large palm cupped him over the thin fabric of his pants and pressed in firmly, making his breath catch in his throat as he brought both hands to fit over firm pectorals.

"No." He grunted roughly after pulling himself back into his own mind, unable to remember a time where he had been more turned on. "No, *I* wanted to be the one to kill you. I wanted him to bring you to your knees before you finished him off so I could claim your last breath."

Hannibal hissed through his teeth as his eyelids fluttered, blunt front teeth catching the skin just under his ear.

"How would you do it?" The palm of Hannibal's hand pressed further, starting slow languid strokes over Will's swelling and twitching arousal.

"I don't... Don't know what would kill you." Will said before hands were pulling down his trousers and he was suddenly completely exposed, his muscles clenched and his cock bobbing gently into the air, half hard and aching for contact again.

Will was *finally* allowing the two of them this, after an age of waiting, dancing around the obvious tension that had built between them, and it felt like nothing he'd ever even considered to be possible.

"Fuck," he said shortly, Hannibal still buried into the crook of his neck, his motions powerful and all-encompassing. He untucked himself from the man's grasp to wrestle the man's belt off.

"I suppose after I found you, injured and burned, I'd use my *hands* until I found something-" he untucked the expensive and expertly tailored pants and pulled them off as well, gaze going

straight to Hannibal's cock. It was observably shorter than his, but that wasn't a disappointment. "-something worse. Something lasting."

He brought his gaze back up to match Hannibal's, more confident now that he'd put them on equal ground once again.

"Perhaps I would push thorns into those roses of yours."

Hannibal's moved one brow upwards, his mouth moving to Will's fast and sudden and his tongue pushing hotly into Will's mouth, pushing fast until his back was pressed against the soft velvet of the drapes on the wall. Hannibal pinned Will there effortlessly, refusing to separate from the kiss.

His cock was thick and heavy between his thighs as Will's brushed it.

"Mm.." Will moaned into Hannibal's mouth as he made lewd, wet passes over the Druid's canine teeth, coaxing his tongue to push and tangle, somehow dominating him in every movement and pulling higher-pitched sounds from Will as his nails scrambled for purchase along his strong back, breathing hard.

He had kissed Hannibal several times over the course of the evening, but allowing himself to think about this, only Hannibal and nothing before or after him, turned up the experience tenfold - one would tell you that a recently fed vampire was more compelling than anything else in the universe, but Will found him compelling regardless, so the experience was multiplied accordingly.

"Y- Oh you like that, huh?" He hissed into Hannibal's mouth.

"You *like* being told I'll try and hurt you because - uh-- you know I'm the only one who would even get *close*."

Hannibal pulled back slightly, leaving Will with his mouth slightly open. "And you enjoy knowing that you and you alone hold the power to destroy me."

"I have half a mind to tell you maybe." Will said impishly, gripping the globes of Hannibal's ass roughly and tugging their bodies together with an inpatient noise, their skin catching and tugging against each other, ripping pleasure from the depths of maltreatment.

"Does the bear enjoy the honey from the hive he refuses to destroy?" Will asked.

"There is no animal that truly relishes the victory of a reward without conflict." Hannibal said back, his hands burying into tousled brown curls as his lips caught Will's once more. Their pace was evening, less hasty now, savoring each second like it was a lush dessert. "We are both entitled to have as much honey as we please, the bees be Damned."

The room began fill with warmth, the air thicker and hotter as it filled with steam and soft floral smells.

Visibly losing his sense of how to hold back for a split second, Hannibal tugged Will almost too hard towards the room that now held a quickly filling, steaming brass tub. He needed to

be clean so all his senses could be filled with Will. He wanted nothing to exist outside of the two of them.

Will was surprised to see the tub here but did not say anything to the contrary, for once agreeing immediately that this was a good plan.

Their hands flirted with the concept of staying together, brushing each other gently as they each stepped into the scalding hot water that made Will shudder pleasantly, sinking into it, the water almost immediately turning pink.

Hannibal relaxed into the water with a sigh and without a word pulled Will down with him so they were facing each other, Will's legs resting over Hannibal's and around his hips.

He decided that wasn't enough and instead leaned forward in order to take a hold of Will with both hands under his ass and pull him firmly into his lap, their erections now pressed flush together between them under the rapidly darkening water. Hannibal buried his nose into the hair just behind Will's right ear, and his fangs scraped dangerously over fragile skin making Will emit a noise of exasperation, tugging Hannibal's hair so his face was pulled away from him, teeth scraping against his throat as they separated.

"Nho, ha, if we're going to take a bath, we're taking a bath." He said, hating himself for saying it but reaching for the soap and soft sponge that sat on the shelf directly next to the tub. It was all he could do to resist grinding down against the demon, introducing his hands along the way, but if Hannibal insisted upon cleanliness before he'd bite him anywhere, before he'd 'relax' Will by fucking him into the feather down mattress, he was going to get clean.

The sound that escaped Hannibal was a quiet, spoiled little growl, his head held back firmly, teeth clenched - but he didn't request otherwise. Before he can even think of an alternative, Will is beginning to softly scrub at the dried blood that had dripped down his neck and jaw. It came off of Hannibal's stubble easily and dripped into the water below.

It was dizzying, the power Will knew he held over the monster that could kill him in less than a second, the control he had now as he moved to pick up one of Hannibal's hands, beginning to wash between manicured fingers with a tongue between his teeth.

"This was your idea. You get what you get." He said evenly.

"And what do I get?"

A firm and warm hand wrapped round Will's cock and began slow strokes up and down, Hannibal's palm and fingers gripping its head a little firmer each time it slipped in and out of his hold.

Will's hips jerked forward with a sharp intake of breath, eyebrows coming together and giving a moment's pause before he once again gripped the back of Hannibal's head, his other hand rising to run the sponge over the demon's adam's apple and watch it move with the noises he made, biting down on his tongue with his effort to stay silent and expressionless.

Hannibal didn't let up what he'd already established as a steady rhythm, strong and fluid strokes with fleeting pressure. He tilted his head back and swallowed as he watched the others' face. Will was biting back every sound, fighting against every twitch of pleasure. Quite the determined man, he thought.

Hannibal's hair was falling wet and loose around his face as he maintained eye contact with Will, pressing his thumb into the tip of his hot, pink head and watching all the blood rush up to his shoulders and pool around his neck and cheeks.

Will ran out of breath, and then completely lost control of the whole operation.

Hannibal's lower lip caught in his blunt front teeth just before they parted and the tip of his tongue stuck out slightly as he slowly grinned, positively *pleased* with himself as he focused his grip on just the head of Will's cock and kept his merciless torment before withdrawing the hand from Will completely and suddenly.

He sat back in the tub and took up the dropped sponge and began to gently wash Will, scrubbing the soap into the sponge before setting to work. Will *knew* that had been what Hannibal planned on doing but was pissed at him regardless, his muscles falling lax and taking him into the other's chest with a fluid movement, making waves in the as he leaned his face against damp, aromatic skin. Pompous asshole.

Ignoring, or *trying to* ignore his achingly hard dick, he nuzzled into the hair that sat under his cheek and begrudgingly accepted the soap and the sponge, sighing. It took a little while to clean them both, but Will wasn't eager to rush anywhere at this point, knowing no matter what *he* wanted that Hannibal simply must have the final damn word about everything.

It was nice, to relinquish control for just a second, he realised. To stop fighting for just a *second* and allow things to happen as they happened without trying to control the outcome, giving that trust to Hannibal instead. It was unfamiliar and it felt like it made him weightless. He didn't dislike it.

Hannibal released the sponge and let it sink under the water. He wrapped his arms around Will and held him, kissing his shoulder softly as his hands stroked the back of his head.

His heart pulled and tugged outward as it attempted to tether itself to Will's with ink black tendrils, tangling into the vines that reached back. Will felt Hannibal vocalize against his shoulder and for once the good doctor didn't have a single thing to say.

Out of all his games he played and all the angles he gambled, Will surprised him by accepting him as he was almost entirely independently. Whether or not Will planned to destroy him later, he could take that as it came - but here as they sat he could be confident in what they were here, in this moment.

Hannibal stood after that, stepping from the tub and walking naked to a linen cabinet, streaks of water trailing down his back and over his ass. Returning to Will with a soft towel, he held it up and gestured to it expectantly.

Will scoffed, but he stood so Hannibal could wrap him in the overlarge towel, feeling like a layer of himself had been stripped away, leaving him without a full layer of skin to be pink and raw in Hannibal's arms.

"I won't pretend to know the intricacies within your physical form, or... How you maintain it or where you got it or anything," he said gently. "But you're really..."

He shrugged awkwardly, not knowing how to compliment a man in this particular way. "Beautiful, handsome. Stunning, I don't know." He attempted. He felt like a fresh-faced version of himself now that the rush of adrenaline was over and his mind had begun to return to normal speed.

Hannibal rubbed Will's back over the towel, looking down at his shoulders as if he had to focus. "This is truly my physical form, original and entire. When I met my maker as a boy, I had a timed death. I was granted magics while spared any aging curse until I was a grown man, and the ether let me age naturally. I just let time take me on it's journey, so… Thank you."

Will ducked his head and shook it minutely.

"Do you know what I see? When I look at you?" The vampire's voice became something different than it had been. "Lucifer himself falling from the Grace of Heaven. What he believed to be his end was only his beginning."

"What does that make you, if you consider me the fallen angel? Are you God?" Will murmured, thinking of Hannibal hundreds of years prior, reaching an age where the punishment finally dawned on him, eternally poisoned by his own desires after reaping the rewards rent-free for such a short period of time in relativity to eternity.

"No." Their fingers intertwined, rough refinery. "I would never turn my back to you with such cruelty as His. No I am Man, and... You are my angel to worship."

Hannibal moved backwards to pull Will along through the wide doorway into his bedroom. The druid watched as steam began to drift off of the demon's skin as if it was suddenly too hot for the water to rest on any longer.

Will swallowed at the tone of voice that Hannibal used, feeling as if steam should rise off of him as well. A coveted angel that was inches from his fall? No one had ever thought anything of him, much less something to *that* extent. He moved to run the towel over his skin to dry himself off, face and hair, back and neck and groin as he tried to catch up. His cock was still frustratingly hard, sensitive even as he ran over it gently with the soft towel for just a moment too long. It had been a moment since anything like this, he made himself realize.

Sudden hands pulled Will to him hard, strong and solid against his body and gripping Will's elbows harshly, nails biting. Hannibal's skin was hot as if a fever had taken him.

He had sank to his knees in front of Will and within a quick moment was holding his cock and slowly stroking him again. His hot breath puffed against the head, pink tongue slipping

out to taste him and it took all Hannibal could to stop from moaning in delight from the sweet taste of the indulgence that had so evaded him.

"Ohh, f-" Will gasped, immediately pushed to what felt like the edge of something once again, pushing his lower lip against his teeth, toes curling inwards.

Hannibal tilted his head upwards to an angle that he could rest at as if he were making the bare minimum effort, looking up at his partner while running rapid flicks of his tongue over his length. He took his time to lick up the heavy drops of precum that rolled down the side of it before wrapping his lips around the head entirely and sucking firmly.

The inside of his mouth is hot and soft and the wet heat slowly sheaths Will's entire erection, Hannibal's strong hands gripping Will's hips so hard it was painful while swallowing him as deeply as physically possible.

Hannibal's nose is quickly pressed into the hair at the base of his cock and Will's hips are held in place by rock solid hands, keeping him from any other movements - the man is a still, gentle pressure, immovable and powerful. It makes Will tremble gently, frustratedly hoping for some sort of friction or movement, but Hannibal seems completely content on taking his time.

"Ih-- I- If you wanted me relaxed-- Fuck! This is not the way to go about it, I'm already so close..." He managed desperately.

Hannibal hummed a lewd, happy exhale around Will's cock and drew back off his length, dragging his tongue widely along the underside. Will was shaking and quivering, choking out his words, and Hannibal's cock was endlessly spilling his own precum onto the fine carpet between his knees. He opened his right hand to take his own arousal around the base and the left continued to work Will's length along with his mouth.

Flaming eyes ran to Will's and they were glazed over with pleasure. It felt *delicious* for Hannibal to taste him like this. The whole situation was arguably even better for him in from his own perspective. This was almost a selfish act of service, greedily sucking Will's cock for his own pleasure just as much as his partner's.

"Move back a few steps to my bed. Sit." He said, to no opposition. Will was welcomed into he soft down mattress and sank back, resisting the urge to tug at long hair again, tucking the strands behind Hannibal's ear with one hand and propping himself back on the opposite elbow. Hannibal restarted his work just as eagerly as he had begun. Everything that he did for Will's pleasure was perfect, every movement as if Hannibal knew him intimately already and could tell when to look up at him, when to stroke his leg, and when to drag his wide tongue right under the head of his swollen cock. It seemed like he was on the cusp of something for what could have been an hour - or a few seconds - before the wave began to crest.

"Yes, uh, ff- Hann, oh I'm coming I'm coming yes, please uhh--" He slurred, voice strained and soft as he bit down on the inside of his cheeks, his voice melting into a growling exclamation without words, hitting climax as he watched worship and admiration once again cross Hannibal's features.

A moan through his nose was all that could be verbalised as Will spilled over his tongue and down his throat, swallowing him down greedily while keeping his lips sealed around his head so he cought everything possible, unwilling to let any of him go to waste.

Will's had hit his first orgasm far faster than usual, and it took him a minute to reorient himself enough to recognize Hannibal's tongue was still lingering on his dick as he smirked up at Will, incredibly bloody pleased with himself as he gripped under Will's thighs and pushed his legs up in order to force Will back flat on the feather soft mattress, Hannibal's mouth kissing and sucking along the inside of his left thigh.

His lips felt Will's heart fluttering rapidly, pushing gold through the artery under his skin.

Will covered his face with both of his hands, still breathing hard as Hannibal fawned over him, feet on the soft blankets of the bed. "You're... Mm..." He said breathlessly, his lips turning up at one corner.

"How much practice have you had over the years?Because, Uuh, that was..." He took a deep breath and released it, relaxing his arms to fall around his head in a halo.

"Centuries of carnal desires for blood and flesh." Hannibal murmured against Will's thigh before he moved up on the bed between Will's legs. "Although it made me terribly choosy.

"Allow me to be transparent so you know exactly what you are getting into," He said very straightforwardly down next to Will's ear, catching it briefly in his blunt front teeth before continuing, "I am going to drink you *dry* Will.. and you will die. But then you will drink from me, and you will live forever."

Hannibal moved his mouth to Will's, speaking between little fleeting kisses, "When you wake you will want to do nothing but feed on anything you can get your hands on - but you will wake up bound, because I'm not sure how powerful you will be and I need to ensure our safety."

Will put his hand under the demon's chin and pulling him back up so they sat face to face. "How long will it take?"

"Only time will tell. A matter of days, usually."

Looking at him was a mixture of chilling fire, like he had stepped into a freezing river of his own accord, just to be taken by the current. The future would stretch on forever if he took this offer of power and fear, accepted a fate of extended life in chosen death. Would it be better than what he could have if he turned Hannibal down?

...Would Hannibal even allow him to do that at this point?

He'd thought everything through, he'd made his choices and his personal amends. He'd been teasing himself with the choice and denying himself the easy answer that every vine within his mind trembled towards. He wasn't supposed to actually want this, he vaguely reminded himself - but he couldn't come up with any good reasons why anymore.

"Remember your promise, Will?"

"Yes. You kill the Dragon and..." Hannibal gripped Will's hips and flipped him into his stomach as if he weighed nothing at all before tracing his nails down the bend of Will's spine, catching his grunt short. "Ungh, I'm yours."

He grabbed the plump of Will's ass to accentuate himself, long fingers dipping between the swells of muscle.

"Shall I show you just how much you are mine?" Will can feel Hannibal shift behind him, both hands spreading his ass apart. Hannibal bit the inside of his own cheek in delight as he felt his mouth water. Without another second he pulled Will's hips back to meet his greedy mouth, licking hot stokes over his tight hole and loudly making his contentment known.

Will felt like a ragdoll in Hannibal's hands, being manhandled and thrown around as if he was nothing -- but he supposed he'd been handed his choice on a silver platter.

"Ohjustfuck*please* be g-gentle, please." He said, but the sound was warm, trusting. He knew Hannibal wanted to hear it, hear everything.

"You're the first of any man who's, uh, who's touched me there, anywhere before I was... On top, hhuh, or with women, so I don't.... Know how it--" he smiled despite himself because he probably should have tried it sooner. That caused him to smile wider as he realized this was silly to be concerned about with the prospect of *dying* before him, but... He'd done that before, arguably.

Hannibal paused in his his affections as affection bloomed in his chest. He was the first and only man who would touch Will like this.

"If you have been on top before, I doubt I'll surprise you. I assure you I'll be as gentle as you need until you ask for more."

Hannibal had no plans of doing this quickly, and this type of treatment usually wasn't incredibly time effective. He was excited to take his time opening Will up for himself.

His tongue returned lapping slow caresses around the puckered entrance, relishing in the most intimate part of Will no one had laid claim to before. His thumbs spread wider as his tongue pushed and probed, breaching the ring of muscle with slow teasing movements.

Will had really only been interested in flings with men, quick and rough and over in not too long. He'd never felt spoiled like this, he'd never had all of the attention on him before with no need to reciprocate, and Hannibal was already bringing his arousal back to attention with the patient, slow strokes that tugged his nerves tight.

The first breach inside of him was better than Will thought it ever *could* be, and his fingers dug into the sheets. His dick hung between spread thighs as he restrained his voice from being too loud, too messy.

Any sort of sex he'd ever experienced had been quick, rough, intimacy deferred. It was to get off, plain and simple. He had never done anything with any animals save for an embarrassing misunderstanding at fourteen that did not pan out past flirting, and he felt like he was breathless just trying to keep up to this feeling of being genuinely treated well and treated first, like a priority. What was sex supposed to be? Was it this? Because if this is what everyone expected from sex he'd assume everyone was consistently disappointed.

Offended that Will dare withhold his voice from him, Hannibal reminded him of his existence by pushing his tongue past the first part of Will's entrance, beginning to move in and out, pressing himself deeper with each motion. His own cock was endlessly spilling precum, a clear thread connecting his swollen, red head to the carpet. It was thick and bobbed lewdly with the pulse of his arousal between his legs.

His tongue felt hotter and longer with each push inside of Will-- now nearing unnaturally long and slick, lewd sounds filling the room as Hannibal drew his tongue away just to press in a finger easily, then another. He moaned into the heat of Will's ass, pink and hot and wet from his mouth. His middle and ring fingers slipped in and out of him slowly, the demon kissing over Will's lower back and ass cheeks with soft purrs of delight.

The druid felt immature at the kinds of sounds he ached to make, felt like if he let himself do so he'd drool onto the sheets through the lips he kept locked tight, endlessly humming soft exclamations into the fabric below. It went on long enough to where he had to look up again, fully aroused and aching, lips swollen with how much he'd been biting them.

"I want to make *you* feel good." He said frustratedly, trying to look back at the other, his face flushed and stubbornly determined. "Don't care how, but I wan-"

Hannibal slipped in a third finger as he was mid-sentence. Satisfied with the feeling, he tilted his head before pressing in deep against the small ridge of Will's prostate, pumping his hand in and out in a building rhythm. As he did he bit into the back of Will's thigh, leaving shallow wounds with his teeth.

His hot tongue lapped at the dribbling blood, fucking into Will with his fingers harder before sighing against his soft skin.

"Let me hear you, Darling."

Every time Hannibal said anything it made Will's hair feel like it was being drawn up by static, like his fur when it stood on end. A flash of irritation shot through him.

He tried to verbalize something, eyes watering as he nearly choked, nodding as if that would help convince anyone. The noises he usually held back were stubborn now, unused to being welcomed, and the moan that finally escaped his lips was guttural and went from one pitch to another.

"Please, I don't want your fingers Iwant*you*, Hannibal"

The fingers withdrew from him abruptly and Hannibal moved up the bed in front of Will and kneeled in front of his face, thick cock throbbing in front of his lips. He stroked a hand

through Will's curls softly, gripping a little firmer to tug his head back.

"Show me, then."

Will blinked tearily, drinking in every inch of Hannibal's erection. He could smell things that he'd never come in contact with before, all spices and heat, and saliva started to pool behind his teeth. He opened his mouth but still managed to give the dirtiest look he could before putting his hands on Hannibal's thighs and sinking down as deep as he could go, the hand in his hair tugging mercilessly as he swallowed.

"Oh Will.." The words caught in Hannibal's throat. "Get it nice and wet, that's it..."

Both of his hands rested in Will's hair as he began to suck and lick around his length as if it were part of a study. He looked perfect like his, stormy gaze teary and pupils huge.

Hannibal had to close his eyes as he hit the back of Will's perfect throat and it took everything for the druid to disengage his gag reflex, coming off with a filthy and wet slide and taking a short second to look up - his demon was *shining* with pride and elation - and Will went down again, humming, moaning, mouth stuffed with cock, greedy and *impatient* but so, so willing to give as much as he'd been given, ass in the air and fluids leaking from every orifice he had in readiness for more.

His gruff impatience was rewarded almost immediately when Hannibal was suddenly behind him too quickly to track, and the whole movement was so fast it would have been comedic if he hadn't begun rubbing his erection into the cleft of his ass. It was slick both up and down, moving easily over the relaxed little hole.

"So sorry… Is *this* what you want, Will?"

"No." Will said roughly as he turned himself over, his dick slapping against his stomach as he faced the man that was towering over him, impressive and gorgeous and just as worked up as Will was, but not as visibly wrecked. He was truly getting pleasure from helping Will feel it, and it made the affection for him grow ever hotter alongside his physical arousal.

"I wanna see you."

He placed his hands under his knees and spread himself wide, his entrance fluttering in eager welcome, chest heaving.

"Like this."

Hannibal bit his lower lip completely taken with the raw beauty of the man in front of him.

"As you wish."

He grabbed Will's hips and pulled him down the mattress to line up for him, sliding him along the soft sheets. He wrapped a hand around himself and gently probed, only pushing in just a bit at first, slowly in and out. Hannibal's fangs drew blood from his bottom lip and Will watched as it dripped down his chin and onto his own stubbled cheek.

Hannibal's mouth opened in a soft gasp as he slipped in further, looking into Will's soul as they finally joined, body mind and soul. The inky blackness of Hannibal's influence shattered Will's remaining walls apart around his consciousness, consumed and enveloped entirely as Will's eyes rolled back, filled.

Tangled green vines began to interweave themselves into the thin black streams, stitching braids into fabric into curtains that parted to reveal the patterns of each damaged mind, willing to reach out and repair what they could for each other.

The mended do not always recover unless they are scrutinized for hairpin fractures, however. Will was no sooner touched by the gentle pressure of Hannibal's mind before he was *pushed* by his blood, toppling him over into a chasm of his final hour. There was no turning back anymore, the choice had been made, and a new beginning had started fresh in the emptied library uncovered by shadowed fingers.

Will's mouth sealed to Hannibal's and he felt like a new man here on top of the most luxurious sheets, a body fit to slide against his perfectly, and a burning that was more like a smoldering set of coals as he *purred a* low, rumbling happy sound on the edge of animal, folding his legs over his lover's back to seal them together in order to keep himself whole.

Hannibal held the sides of the druid's face and Will looked adoringly up at him as he set a slow, affectionate pace, getting used to the brilliantly unfamiliar sensation and enjoying every sound that Hannibal was making now, the desperate noises uninhibited by his usual grace and poise.

He felt like he had been given an open world to explore but had happily contained himself in one comfortable section of it, secure and coveted under the Vampire's strong body and his irises flickered to cobalt when Hannibal finally thrust into one particular spot once again, rolling back into his head as he *beamed,* his entire body thrumming as a string would inside of a mandolin, the music full of high, soprano pleasure.

Hannibal's mouth hung open in a parted grin as he shifted to watch himself move in and out of Will eagerly - he made sure to pay close attention to the way his partner reacted, rewarded with sparks of cobalt bursting through Will's veins and crackling into his irises as his moans began to match the more merciless rhythm of each thrust. Hannibal's damp hair fell loosely about his shoulders and face, strong hands now gripping Will's hips in the bend of his legs.

"You're so, ouh, Han, you feel so good, fuckyes, jhust like that, please.." Will panted, his legs shoved up and down, tucking his thumbs underneath Hannibal's strong fingers that are gripping harshly into his hips, accenting the pleasure with little bits of pain that he savors.

The thrusts begin to bounce his tits beautifully and he can't think about *anything* else anymore, completely overtaken by Hannibal's wants, needy for approval, utterly enraptured.

"Nnn…" Hannibal's head fell back as Will asked for it so sweetly, completely lost in their shared lust. He was beautiful like this, flushed and glistening with sweat.

He leaned forward to grind hard against Will's prostate with each adjustment of his hips, pulling the brunet's head to the side by his hair.

"Anything for you."

Will's tongue fell out of his mouth for a long moment as he tried to pull his mind back to a point he could use to communicate. He gave no resistance to baring his neck to the air in submission, scalp throbbing in time with his heartbeat.

"Please, I'm yours, I'm not… show me I-- uuh, claim me for your own, fuck, share yourself with me." He said, his mind open and prepared, every inch ready and aching to be filled with as much of the other as it could fit, to create one from two in the empty space Hannibal had sculpted from the clay of an unprompted mind. "I'm yours, mine…"

Hannibal groaned before he ground his cock as deep as possible before withdrawing and slamming back in hard.

Will whined, the pressure inside of him accompanied by a new sensation, the hot searing pleasure of sharp fangs buried deep into his throat, and Hannibal's eyes fluttered and rolled back and he *drank*. His jaws clamped tight around muscle and skin, his cock swelled inside Will before he gripped him around his jaw with both thumbs pressed to his pulse points and came hard into his ass. Their voices echoed through each other's heads in a chant.

"Mine..! *Mine*!"

Chapter End Notes

We had a few optional endings for this, but in the end we decided to end it here. It will remain a blend of complete and incomplete. I apologize if that upsets you, but if it helps, we sure did make it pretty far. :)

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